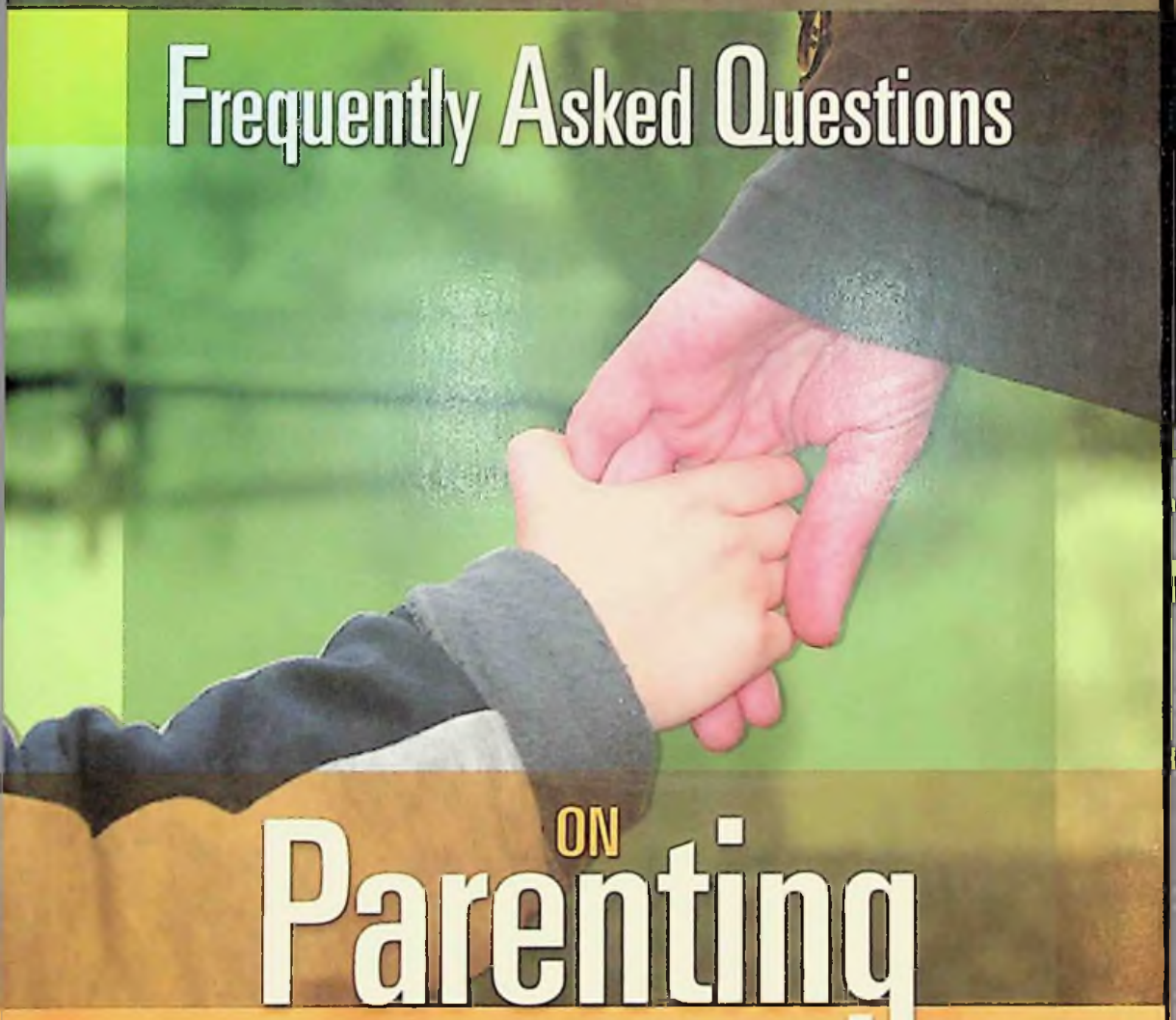
ANSWERS TO

Frequently Asked Questions



ON Parenting

(PART 2)

Drs. Ekram & Mohamed Rida Beshir

amana publications

Answers

to

Frequently Asked Questions

on

Parenting

[PART 2]

Drs. Ekram & Mohamed Rida Beshir

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We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our daughter, Sumaiya, for all the time and hard work she put into editing this book. We will be forever indebted to her for her gracious support and dedication to this work. May Allah bless her, keep her on the Straight Path and reward her with *jannah*.

We kindly request that every reader make *du'a* for her.

Introduction

As we indicated in the introduction of part one of this series, during workshops and convention sessions, we usually allocate time to answer questions from the audience. We try our best during this time to respond to the questions in the most comprehensive way. However, with a hot topic like parenting, particularly in North America, there is never enough time to give detailed answers and at the same time respond to as many audience member's questions as possible. Over the years, we have noticed that certain questions come up repeatedly during our parenting workshops and lectures in various conferences/conventions on the subject of raising children in the North American society. Because of this, we feel that these questions represent crucial issues of concern occupying the minds of the great majority of parents, and as such, they deserve to be addressed in enough detail to help clarify these issues and provide Muslim parents with the proper advice supported by Qur'an as well as the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*.

This is why we decided to write this series of books to answer "Frequently Asked Questions about Raising Children in North America."

This is part two of the series. We apologize for the delay and for not making it available to the reader right after part one as we promised when we started the series. Due to both our health conditions as well as a very heavy traveling schedule presenting our parenting workshops, we were unable to find the proper time to put into part two of the series for some time. We thank Allah *SWT* that He blessed our time and effort, and finally with His grace, that we are able to present the reader with this work.

Part two covers a variety of topics ranging from character building and personality development to the environment. It also addresses

questions relating to young children, pre-teens, and teens. It is important to note that all the questions in this series are real and were asked on one occasion or another by attendees of a workshop, an audience member at a conference/convention, or during our live dialogue on various websites such as www.masnet.org and www.islamonline.net.

We would also like to emphasize that our methodology in answering these questions will, as is always the case with our books, be from an Islamic perspective, drawing heavily on verses of Qur'an, teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, and events of his Seerah. We will also, insha'a Allah, draw on the practical experience we have walhamdulilah gained from countless parenting and counseling sessions during the last few years and our knowledge of child psychology.

We realize that this is a huge responsibility and we sincerely pray to Allah *SWT* to help us provide the right answers to these questions as well as to make this series benefit as many Muslim families as possible in their quest to be the best Muslim parents for their children. We also ask Him to protect our Muslim families, our Muslim youth, our Muslim children and the whole Muslim Ummah.

A note on all Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*:

Please note that throughout the book, all the Quranic verses and sayings Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* mentioned are the English translations of the ning of the original text in Arabic. Though we have striven to use the t accurate English translations available, we remind the reader that any all translations are: firstly, not the original words of Allah *SWT* or His ophet *SAAW*, and secondly, can never be as accurate as the original Arabic text.

Drs. Ekram & M. Rida Beshir

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Building Characters and Developing Personality

I have three children: a 7 year old boy, a 5 year old girl and a 4 year old boy. I believe in raising them as strong confident Muslims who are comfortable with themselves as Muslims and are even proud to belong to the Muslim Ummah. I feel this is very important for their identity and I would like it if you could provide me with a few tips on what I should do to fulfill this vision I have for my children.

Answer This is a very important question and the concern of this sister is genuine and every Muslim parent should have the same concern. Muslims living in North America, Europe, or other places as minorities, should always have a vision for their children to raise them as strong confident personalities who are proud of their identity as Muslims. To fulfill this vision, parents have to work very hard with their children and do following:

- Strengthen their faith and belief in Allah as their creator and Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* as their role model
- Make them feel loved and accepted
- Train them to be capable and highly skilled
- Help them to be critical thinkers

Here are some tips parents can use to achieve the above goals:

To strengthen the Islamic beliefs of our children, we have to help them know Allah *SWT* and love Him, as well as to know the Prophet *SAAW* and take him as a role model. To do this, we have to link them to their creator *SWT*. See the answer to question 4 in this section for tips on how to link our children to Allah *SWT* and keep them connected with Him

at various stages of their lives. Parents also have to live Islam at home, providing a wonderful and warm family atmosphere, be fair in dealing with the children, and participate together in various positive and healthy activities. Another important element in helping strengthen our children's belief in Islam is to help them acquire Islamic habits and concepts[1] and teach/train them to say various Prophetic du'as at different times of the day and on various occasions.

For our children to be confident and feel proud as Muslims, it is very important that they feel loved and accepted for who they are, and not because they are top academic achievers or because they have strong athletic abilities. They have to feel valued by their parents, and every achievement they do should be acknowledged and applauded. Parents should make their children feel special as individuals by trying to find their children's area of strength, recognizing it, and helping their children develop it and excel in it. In their dealings with their children, parents should also avoid being perfectionist, over protective, or humiliating. This will help strengthen children's self esteem.[2]

We should also strive very hard to make sure that our children are capable and highly skilled. This will help them feel confident and proud of their identity as Muslims because they will not feel that they are less than their peers. Rather, they will feel that they are equal to their peers and can compete in every area with them. Prophet Mohammad *SAAW* advised us to teach our children every useful skill for their age and their environment. Omar Ibn Al-Khattab *RAA* said: "Teach you children swimming, shooting, and horse back riding." These types of skills were the survival skills needed for their environment. As parents we can't limit the meaning of these teachings to these three skills only. We should teach

[1] See chapter 6 in our book *Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope* amana Publications, second edition 2004

[2] See chapter 1 of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, An Islamic Perspective*. Amana Publications, third edition, 2004

our children every possible skill that is needed for their survival in the Western society. Sports skills relevant to Western society, such as riding a bike at a young age, knowing how to throw a baseball, catch it with a glove, and hit it with a bat etc. are very important for our children's self esteem. The time spent training them in these types of skills is not wasted time. It is a great investment in their well-being and self image. We should also teach our children other skills needed for their survival in this society such as administrative skills, computer skills, communication skills, business skills, and even self defense in some areas of North America.

To help our children be critical thinkers, we should work with them in the following areas:

- Train them in decision making from an early age. For example, for a three year old child, rather than picking an outfit out for him/her and dressing him/her, it is better to put two outfits on the bed and ask him/her to choose one for the outing. For a 5 or 6 year old, rather than deciding on your own what you want him/her to do during the weekend, it is better to ask him/her how they want to spend their weekend. Find out if he/she wants to visit a friend or if he/she wants to go to the park.
- Consult with children from an early age about decisions related to family matters, such as the food they want to eat at supper, the move you are planning to a new house/apartment, etc.
- Guide and explain the consequences of different choices to help them understand the pros and cons of the decisions they make and feel comfortable with it.
- Allow children to occasionally make their own choices in non-critical matters such as the type of snack they will take with them to school, etc.

Is it OK to spoil our children and pamper them?

Answer The answer to this question will depend on how the questioner defines spoil and pamper. If spoil and pamper means allowing children to do anything they like, without teaching them that there are consequences for their actions and that they have to pay attention to these consequences and think about them before doing these actions, then of course, in this case, it is not OK to spoil or pamper our children.

If spoil and pamper means that when our children make a mistake, we don't point out to them that their action is not accepted, or indicate to them that they have made a mistake, or teach them how to do it properly next time, or help them during the process of training them in the correct and acceptable behaviour, then of course it is not OK to pamper or spoil our children.

If spoil and pamper means that whenever they ask us to buy something for them (a toy, clothing), we rush and buy it for them no matter how many other toys they have, or when we last bought clothes for them, and whether or not they need it, then of course, in this case, it is not OK to spoil or pamper them.

If spoil and pamper means that when they ask us to go on a school trip or to attend the prom or other school parties where opposite sexes are

mixing and mingling freely, of course it is not OK to spoil and pamper them. Or if it means that we allow them to participate in such activities/parties, where sexually stimulating music is being played loudly and almost everyone is drunk and dancing like crazy, of course, it is not OK. As a matter of fact we should never grant them their wishes to attend these kinds of activities because of the unhealthy and dire consequences on their morals and ethical behaviour. Parents should discuss with and explain to their children the logic behind not allowing them to participate in these kinds of gatherings, and should never give in to their children's pleas or any other societal pressure.

In all of the above cases and any other similar situations, it is not OK to spoil and pamper our children. However, if spoiling our children and pampering them means making them feel special and close to us, this is not only allowed, but it is also recommended and encouraged. If spoiling and pampering them means developing a strong bond between us and our children, if it means expressing our love to them very often, then, again, it is not only OK, but it is encouraged and recommended to do so. In fact, it is particularly important in this society, where Muslims are a minority, to build a strong bond and open channels of communication between parents and children. It is just as crucial for Muslims living as a minority in any place in the world. This is because we want our children to be able to take after us and accept our advice and the values and concepts we try to instill in them, particularly in the adolescent stage where teens are strongly drawn to pleasing their peers and are continuously seeking their peers' approval.

Making our children feel special and having this special relationship with them will be of great help in the above area. That is why it is important to spoil and pamper our children in the correct sense.

(a) I attended one of your "Positive Parenting Skills" workshops where you emphasized repeatedly the importance of using the young age of the child to instill Islamic concepts and build healthy habits before they move to stage two. I have two children 14 and 16 years old, and I didn't do this with them when they were young. Does this mean that I missed the boat and I wouldn't be able to help them having a good Islamic personality? Is their anything that I should be doing now to rectify the situation?

(3-b) I attended one of your positive parenting skills workshops. I remember you talking about the two stages that children generally go through as far as approval concerns. My question is: Suppose I didn't start early with my child, and he is now in the second stage, can I do anything to make sure that he will become a good person Islamically?

(3-c) Can you please advise us on the following: For parents who didn't do a good job with their children, who had no chance to see your books and follow your beautiful recommendations, their children are now fashionable, they know little religion and they don't even apply it. They dress Western and act Western. Is it too late for them to try to do something with their children? I still have some hope, but I don't know where and how to start?

These three questions address the same issue, as such, we will answer them together insha'a Allah. They are very important questions and deserve to be addressed in detail. As such, and for the benefit of all readers, it is necessary to explain and

provide a brief summary of stage two, as mentioned in the above questions. When it comes to seeking approval, in general, children go through two stages. In the first stage, which extends from birth to almost 9-10 years old, the approval of parents is the most important thing for children. The younger the child is, the stronger his need for approval from his parents. As the child gets older, a shift starts taking place toward seeking approval from peers rather than parents. When the child becomes a teenager, he is heavily drawn to seeking approval mainly from his peers (teens around the same age). This is stage two indicated in the questions. Our recommendation in our workshops is that parents invest wisely and intelligently in stage one through instilling important Islamic concepts and building a strong bond between them and their children in order to avoid the negative effects of stage two.

Now, to get back to the question where the parents didn't invest properly in stage one and their children are now in stage two. To start with, we would like to emphasize that as Muslims we should never lose hope or feel helpless and despair, no matter the situation. Allah *SWT* says in Qur'an:

"Don't despair or lose hope in the soothing mercy of Allah. Only disbelievers despair and lose hope"[3]

This verse is instructing us to never give up in the face of any problem. We should always exert all our efforts and exhaust all means available to us to try to find a solution for any situation we face.

In the case of parents who neglected to invest properly during the early years of their kids' childhood, when the approval of parents means a lot to children, and now the children are in stage two, it may be more

[3] (Q 12, V87)

difficult to help shape their Islamic identity now, but insha Allah, it can still be done. Here are some recommended actions and tips that could help with this matter:

- Do some serious reading to understand the nature of the stage your teen is going through and to prepare yourself to be able to deal with him/her properly
- Keep a good, strong, and open relationship with your teen and be prepared to deal with him/her now as an adult
- Use every opportunity to express your love and show your genuine concern about the well being of your teen
- Find out something s/he loves or likes to do, learn about it, and make it part of your interests. This will help in opening the channel of communication between you and your teen.
- Support existing community youth groups and help in establishing new ones to make sure that your teen has a forum for entertainment and activities
- Try to surround your teen with a group of good friends who can apply positive peer pressure on him/her
- Allow your teen to participate in decent main stream activities (sports, community services, etc.) However, with this, you should monitor the effect of being part of these activities on your teen's behaviour (use of foul/vulgar language, wrong thoughts, wrong relationships with other gender, etc.)

Q. 4

(a) I have a three year old son and I believe that letting him know Allah and linking him to his Creator is very important in keeping him on the straight path when he gets older. Is it too early to speak to him about Allah? How can I link him to Allah? Please provide me with some practical means to achieve this goal Jazakum Allah Khayran.

(4-b.) How should the concept of God be approached when teaching little children?

Answer

First, we would like to say to our sister: "No it is not too early." As a matter of fact, we should start to link our children to their Creator right from the moment they are born. This is a very important concept for Muslims. It is a continuous process that starts with the birth of the child. The instruction of the prophet, *SAAW*, is to make "*Azan*," the call to prayer, in the right ear of the child, and *Iqamah* in the left ear, right after birth. This way, the first word they hear is the name of Allah. From there on, parents should always make sure that the child is hearing the name of Allah, the recitation of Qur'an, tasbeeh, repetitive prayers, and supplication; even if they are at a very young age and they don't understand the meaning of these actions and words. Parents should have the child present with them in the same place where they make their *jama'a* prayers. Parents could carry the child after he prayer and make the end of prayer *tasbeeh* on the child's hand.

is important for parents to try to present Allah to the child in a positive, rotecting and loving image, and not in a threatening and frightening way.

It is quite unfortunate that some parents always paint a picture of Allah as a punishing God to their children. For example, a mother might tell her child "if you don't do such and such, Allah will put you in hell fire". What's more, some parents may repeat the same threat to the child over and over again. This is the wrong attitude, and paints the wrong picture of Allah to the child. Young children get frightened easily. It is more appropriate and better to talk to them about Allah positively, by saying: "Allah loves you because you helped your sister." Or, "Allah loves you because you perform your prayers."

Parents should help in capitalizing on situations to make the child feel that Allah is helping him or her. For example, if a child misplaces something, parents can use that situation to help the child find the lost item while at the same time saying the prayer for finding a lost item:

"Oh Allah who guides every lost animal, guide me to find my lost subject." Then, when the child finds the lost item (with your help), this will leave a great impact on the child that Allah helps him or her.
Parents should make sure that the child understands that all authority belongs to Allah; and that even parents are subject to His authority. This can only be achieved through leading by example and by practicing what they preach to the child, such as praying, fasting, and being truthful.
Parents should further help create favourable situations for the child to see that others are also subject to Allah's authority and engage in the same types of activities as s/he (ie praying, fasting etc.). This can be achieved by visiting other Muslim families and participating in Mosque activities and Islamic events.

Q. 5

My daughter is 5 years old and she asks me questions almost continuously. Lots of times I feel frustrated and ask her in a nervous voice to stop asking questions. I sometimes even yell and shout, ordering her to stop talking and not to ask about these kinds of things. It looks like this is not working because she is still asking me questions on a continuous basis. My question is: am I doing the right thing telling her to stop asking questions? Also, what should I do if I don't know the answer to her questions?

Answer

When children ask questions, they are trying to learn about things around them and find explanations to situations they don't understand and can't comprehend on their own. Sometimes, children also ask questions to attract their parents' attention and spend more time with them. In other instances, they do this to prove to their parents that they can use the language properly. In all cases, children asking questions may not necessarily be a bad thing. As a matter of fact, it is an opportunity for parents to strengthen the bond with their children and to teach and educate them about good habits and proper Islamic concepts.

As long as the children are asking the questions politely, parents should never tell them to stop asking. They should always try to find the time to answer their children's questions without delay. Even if the children ask the question in an impolite way, this is not an excuse not to spend time with them to answer the question. The proper reaction would be to teach the children the polite way of asking questions and then answer their questions.[4]

See the "Indicate, Educate, and Train" technique on correcting behaviour explained in :tails in our book *Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah*, Amana Publications, rst edition, 2003

Refusing to answer our children's questions or trying to stop them from asking questions through yelling and shouting is a negative and unhealthy parental behaviour and should be completely avoided. If parents continue to do this, it could lead to the following undesired results:

- Children may seek answers to their questions from other sources which may not be safe, or could provide the children with wrong answers
- Children may stop asking their parents questions, which would leave parents unaware of what the children are thinking about and, as such, unable to provide them with the proper guidance needed
- The bond between children and parents will become weak. Which may have serious effects particularly when children approach the adolescent stage

Having discussed the above, we believe it is very important that parents give particular attention to their children's questions and try to show genuine interest in their children's concerns. Ignoring our children's questions or ordering them to stop asking will certainly lead to immediate as well as future problems, as such, it should be completely avoided.

As for what the reader should do if she doesn't know the answer to the child's questions. First, let us assure her that this is not a serious issue. The child doesn't know the answer either and is not looking for a detailed answer. The most important thing is that you always give a simple answer that suits the child's age and that you always give factual information. In all situations, always tell the truth and never give false information because you want to avoid answering the question or because the question is embarrassing. We refer the reader to part one of this series "Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on Parenting" Question 42 to see the detailed answer to a common question (Where did I come from?) that is usually asked by children around the age of your daughter.

Also there is nothing wrong in telling the child that you don't know the answer or in directing him/her to ask another trusted person such as his father, uncle, or the Imam of your Islamic Center particularly with questions related to Islam.

I'm an angry father with a very hot temper. I have been trying to change this habit for sometime, however I haven't succeeded so far. I'm really having a hard time changing my bad habits and my negative way of dealing with things. I know that it is harmful and destructive to continue behaving this way, however, as I said, all the previous attempts to change failed miserably. It looks like either I'm using the wrong approach for change, or I'm not strong enough to go through the process of improving and correcting my bad habits. I need your help in two areas:

- *Can I protect my children from picking up these bad habits from me?*
- *How can I change and replace my bad habits with good ones to avoid the negative impact on my children*

Answer

To answer the first part of this question, related to protecting the children from picking up the bad habits of their father, usually, it is very difficult for parents to ask the children to do something while the parents themselves are not doing it or are doing something different. Modeling and leading by example is the most effective way of parenting.[5] Allah *SWT* made Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* our role model to learn from his example. He said:

"Certainly, you have the best model in the person of the messenger of Allah for those who hope in Allah and the Hereafter and engaged in Allah's remembrance a lot."[6] As parents we should try our best to learn from the

[5] Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Beshir; *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, an Islamic perspective*, amana publications, third edition, 2004, chapter 4

[6] (Q33, V21)

Prophet Muhammad and model the proper behaviour to our children so they can learn from us.

Our children are like small plants that absorb the water they are being watered with. The small plants absorb everything in the water; they don't differentiate between the various minerals dissolved in this water. They don't pick and choose. They just absorb everything. If a harmful mineral is part of the contents of the water, the small plants will certainly absorb it. They don't filter the water and pick out only the good components. Again, they absorb everything. Young children are exactly the same. They pick up everything from the surrounding environment. Because of this, Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* emphasized the importance of environment in many of his sayings.[7]

Based on the above, we feel that it is difficult to protect children from picking up bad habits from their parents, and we feel that parents should try their best to get rid of these habits to be good role models for their children.

Does this mean that every child of parents who have bad habits will grow to have these bad habits as part of his/her personality? Of course the ver is (NO). However, other environmental factors have to be present elp the child to not pick up the bad habits of parents and to pick up d habits from these environmental influences. These factors could be in e form of other adults, who have good habits and behaviour and live and interact closely to the child such as, uncles, teachers, and Imams and other personalities the child meets frequently in Islamic Centers as well as Islamic conventions and conferences. As such, it is very important for parents to make sure that they surround their children with good Muslims and facilitate attending various activities in Mosques and youth centers as well as travel with them occasionally to attend Islamic National conventions and regional conferences.

[7] See chapter 3 of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, an Islamic perspective*, amana publications, third edition, 2004

As for the second part of this question related to changing parents' bad habits and replacing them with good and positive ones, the process of Self Search for self improvement described in our book *Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah.*[8] could be of great help. Here is a summary of the process:

"The origin of Self-Search in Islam is the concept of *mohasabah*. It is a very important concept in Islam and it comes from the following verse:

"Oh you who believe, remain conscious of Allah (have *taqwa*), and let every human being look to what he has sent ahead for the morrow. And once again, remain conscious of Allah (have *taqwa*), for Allah is fully aware of all that you do."[9]

The Prophet *SAAW* also emphasized that we should always assess and evaluate our actions and deeds. In fact, he labeled the person who does not do this as ghafel or a'jez, which means careless, complacent, and unable. Shaddad Ibn Awes *RAA* narrated that the Prophet *SAAW* said:

"A wise person is one who blames himself for his shortcomings and works hard for what comes after death, while a careless and complacent person (ghafel) or unable person (*a'jez*) is one who follows his whims and desires and keeps hoping for the mercy of Allah."[10]

Omar Ibn al-Khattab *RAA* used to say:

"Review, evaluate, and assess yourself before you are assessed. Weigh your deeds before they are weighed against you, and prepare yourself for the day where you will be fully exposed."[11]

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[8] Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Beshir. *Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah.* amana Publications, 2004

[9] (Q59, V18)

[10] Ahmad, Ibn Majah, and Termezy

[11] Ahmad

Al-Hassan al-Basry *RAA* used to say:

"Believers observe themselves and maintain their good deeds. They always review, assess, and evaluate their status. Those who do this in life will have an easy time on the Day of Judgment. And those who do not will have a difficult time on the Day of Judgment."[12]

The following is reported in the tablets of Ibraheem:

"A wise person should divide her time into four portions: one portion to supplicate to her Lord, a second portion to review, evaluate, and assess herself, the third portion to reflect upon the creation of Allah, and the fourth portion to work and earn her living."[13]

We should remember that one day we will be fully exposed, as Allah *SWT* says in Surah al-Haqqah:

"On that day, you will be exposed to view, no secret of yours will remain hidden."[14]

Therefore, it is a wise practice for believers to assess and review their actions regularly. Relationships can be enhanced if actions are monitored and changed as soon as faults are discovered. Scholars recommend that rocess of *mohasabah* be implemented to help improve and enhance the of our *taqwa* and closeness to Allah. This process should be done ntly to achieve the best possible results. It requires that parents assess ctions, first as individuals, then together as a couple. They should a list of questions to ask themselves, maybe at the end of the day or he end of the week. This list of questions should cover their daily activ-

[12] Al-Bedaiah Wal-Nehaiah, edition 2.07 for Imam Ismacil Ibn Katheer Al-Demashqy
[13] Ibn Hibban and Hakim
[14] (Q69, V18)

ities with their children, as well as characteristics and behaviours, such as worship and interaction with others. This will help the parents evaluate how good their days are going and discover whether there is room for improvement. The following are examples of questions that their list should include:

- Did I perform my daily prayers on time?
- Did I donate money and charity for the sake of Allah?
- Did I think about what I wanted to say before speaking?
- Did I hurt the feelings of my fellow humans in any way?
- Did I express my love and appreciation for my children and family members?
- Did I thank my spouse for his or her efforts in helping me with the children?
- Did I speak nicely about my family members?
- Did I treat my children kindly?
- Did I.....?

This is just a sample of the questions that we should all ask ourselves to evaluate our performance during a specific day or week. If the answers are positive, we should be thankful to Allah *SWT*. If we realize that there are shortcomings in our performance, we should make a strong commitment to correct our mistakes and perform better in the future.

Parents can do a lot to improve their parenting skills through the Self-Search process. This process helps parents instill certain great qualities in their children that will help them become strong and confident Muslims who can resist the temptations around them. The Self-Search process can also help parents ensure that they themselves have these qualities. If parents do not have positive qualities, they will not be able to instill any in their children. Such qualities can only be acquired through hard work that starts with an honest and sincere **SELF-SEARCH**, to make sure that what parents say and do has the proper impact on their children and supports and

motivates them. It helps children build a strong, balanced, personality, have a positive outlook on life, and be confident that they can have not only a positive impact on their surroundings but also a profound one. With such characteristics, children will be able to take what is good and leave what is bad, and even influence the society they live in. They can steer it in the right direction by exercising proper moral values for their own well-being and for the well-being of the generations to come.

Parents should follow these six steps to implement the Self-Search process:

Search
Evaluate
Acknowledge
Reinforce
Change
Hang on

Search within ourselves and review all the actions and parental behaviours that we use with our children. We must dig deep into our past, thinking back to childhood, and uncover any hidden reasons that might be the source of our parental behaviour. Often, we may be talking to our children in a certain way, and if we stopped to think about it, we would realize that we are doing exactly what our mom or dad used to do with us. The following questionnaire will help us in the **searching** process.

Answer the following questions as best as you can and be honest with yourself.

<u>During my childhood and my teen years:</u>

1. a) I felt that my parents loved me because they told me verbally and through hugs and kisses.

b) My parents didn't say that they loved me and/or they did not hug and kiss me, but I could feel their love indirectly at times.

c) I didn't feel my parents' love and doubted that they loved me at all.

2. a) I felt that my parents were interested in me and that they took my personal affairs seriously, despite their busy schedules.

b) I felt that my parents did not pay much attention to my personal affairs. I often felt like my parents did not treat me as if had a distinct personality from the rest of my siblings.

c) I didn't get any attention at all from my parents.

3. a) I felt my parents' encouragement and support and they helped me whenever they could.

b) I didn't feel my parents' encouragement and support and they didn't help me when they could have.

4. a) I felt my parents' approval and knew that they took my efforts seriously no matter what the results were.

b) I didn't feel my parents' approval unless I took on more than I could handle to meet their expectations.

c) I didn't feel my parents' approval no matter what I did.

5. a) My parents were strict with me and expected me to take on responsibilities.

b) My parents were not always strict with me and did not always expect me to take on responsibilities.

c) My parents were never strict with me and didn't expect me to do anything.

6. a) My parents often compared me with my siblings or other kids we knew, which made me very sad.

b) My parents appreciated me as I was.

7. Write the name of someone who had a positive effect on you during your childhood and growing years.

8. Is this person one of your parents?

9. Write the name of someone who had a negative effect on you during your childhood and growing years.

10. Is this person one of your parents?

Evaluate the actions and sayings we use in dealing with our children. Which of these actions are positive, supportive, and based on Islamic values and teachings, and which of these actions are negative, unsupportive, and have no basis in Islamic teachings? An example of a negative action is when we, as parents, try to resolve a conflict with our child while we are angry. If we yell, shout, and fight with the child just to vent our anger, we are using a negative parental behaviour. However, if we control our anger by using the anger management techniques prescribed to us by our beloved Prophet *SAAW*, teach our child to do the same, and then discuss the problem calmly, we are using a positive parental behaviour. More examples of positive and negative parental behaviours can be found in our book *Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah*. The following is another questionnaire that will help in the process of evaluation.

Please answer the following questions with "yes" or "no."

As a parent:

1. I feel that I had little experience with my first child. This caused me to be too strict or too lenient with him or her.

2. I expect perfection from myself when I am with my children and I often feel like a failure when I can't do the perfect thing.

3. I feel that cleaning the house and preparing the food is more important than playing with my children or taking them to the park.

4. I don't often let my children try certain things that I think are difficult, because I wasn't able to do them when I was a child.

5. I feel that I'm raising my children in the same way that my parents raised me, despite the difference in time and place. This is because I don't know of a better way to raise them.

6. The way I treat my children shows that I don't have confidence in their ability to do things.

7. I let my children make simple decisions that are specific to them and reasonable for their age.

8. I feel that the stress and new responsibilities of adapting to a new environment, as an immigrant, are a heavy burden on my spouse and I. They don't leave us enough time to meet the needs and wants of our children.

Acknowledge our findings after we answer the above questions, and categorize them as either positive or negative behaviours. Again, the positive ones are those that agree with Islamic teachings, are suitable for the environment, and help our children become strong and confident Muslims. The negative behaviours are those that are mainly from inherited tradition, have no basis in Islamic teachings, may not be suitable for the environment, and may make our children feel defeated as Muslims. Acknowledging our strengths and weaknesses is the first step in improving our parental behaviour. After that, we have to put our trust in Allah *SWT* and make a commitment to positive change. Changing unhealthy habits is the key to success, as the great scholar, Ibn al-Qayyim said:

"And the core of the matter is in leaving out the unhealthy, inherited habits."

Reinforce the positive parental behaviours and keep practicing them with our children. If they work, we must continue using them.

Change the negative parental behaviours and replace them with positive

ones. We have to work hard at this because change does not come easily. It takes hard work to change habits, so we have to be patient and keep trying. Changing bad habits into good ones is worth the struggle. The expected benefits in our children's development are too important for us not to try our best to change these habits. When trying to change our bad habits or negative parenting behaviour, we should follow the advice of the Prophet *SAAW* and always perform *salat-ul-hajah*, the prayer of need, and make *du'a* intensively, to help us in the process of trying to become a better parent. In addition, we must repeat this prayer a few times, rather than just performing it once.

Hang On: We cannot give up right away. We should put our trust in Allah and keep trying. As parents, we can learn new ways and improve on our old ways. The positive results will be certain if we follow the above steps. It may take longer than we think, but we can't give up. The reward will be tremendous if we work hard and make a sincere effort to become better parents.

Finally, we would like to remind parents that changing behaviour is a long process that requires patience, endurance, persistence, and sincerity. It is something that takes time to achieve. You may have to go through this process a few times, but don't give up. Set a reasonable goal for yourself, try your best to achieve it gradually, put your trust in Allah, pray often, and make a lot of *du'a* asking for His support. The results, *insha'Allah*, will be certain."

Q. 7

My daughter is seven years old. She is a good child who tries to do her best in everything. Sometimes she wants to do something that is hard for her age. She says Bismillah "In the name of Allah" and expects that it will get done. Other times she wishes for things to happen that she likes and wants badly. She makes Du'a for them to happen. When they don't happen she feels let down and asks; "How come Allah didn't listen to my Du'a?" What should I tell her when she asks such questions?

Answer

This is a very good question and parents should welcome these types of questions from their children. As a matter of fact, parents should encourage their children to ask questions because in every question asked, there is a great opportunity for parents to instil certain Islamic concepts in their children's hearts, minds and souls. These concepts are of immense significance in shaping their personalities. Let us see what concepts we can talk about with our children when they ask such questions:

- The concept of *Du'a* in Islam.
- The concept of universal laws created by Allah *SWT*
- The concept of cause and effect, the law of consequences
- Etc.

When your daughter asks you this question it is your duty to use this opportunity to explain to her the proper understanding of the above concepts.

For example, when explaining the proper understanding of *Du'a*, parents have to make sure that the child understands the following:

- *Du'a* is an act of worship first and foremost. Allah *SWT* instructed us to worship him via making *Du'a*.
- We are rewarded for making *Du'a* with the proper intention
- Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* taught us various *Du'as* to say on

different occasions and at different times of the day and night, such as when we wake up in the morning, before we eat our meals, when we leave our house, when we put on a new dress, when we look in the mirror, when we use the washroom, when we ride any means of transportation such as cars or planes, when we are blessed with a baby and so on.

• Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* also taught us that Allah *SWT* could respond to our *Du'a* in the following three ways:[15]

– Answer the *Du'a* immediately and grant us our request without delay

– Remove certain difficulties or harmful things that could have happened to us without the *Du'a*

– Not grant us our wish immediately in this life, but reserve a greater reward for us in the Hereafter with this *Du'a*

Also, as a parent, you have to explain the laws of nature created by Allah to your daughter. Allah *SWT* told us that to get certain results in any area of our lives, we have to work for these results. No one would get good marks on his/her exam without studying the subject of the exam very well no matter how much *Du'a* s/he makes. No one would pass a driving test without spending hours of training on how to drive a car no matter how much *Du'a* s/he makes. As such, it is not enough to say "In the name of Allah" or to make *Du'a* to get our wishes fulfilled and our needs granted. We have to work to achieve the desired results. This is part of the universal laws that Allah created and no one is above these laws. Every action we do and every move we make has its own consequences. We have to live with these consequences because we are responsible for our actions. We have to exert our efforts and exhaust our means in the area of concern, and then we seek the help of Allah through making *Du'a*, asking Him to grant us the results we are hoping for. This is the proper way for Muslims: hard work associated with seeking Allah's help via *Du'a*. *Du'a* alone won't work. Just saying "In the name of Allah" alone won't work, because this is the universal law and no one is above Allah's laws.

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15. "The *Du'a* of the Messenger", Abd Allah Haggag, Alhelal Library, Byroot, Lebanon, 1986

Q. 8

What are proper and improper ways of disciplining a child? Can you give examples?

Answer This is a very good question. We are glad that the reader is talking about disciplining the child, not about punishing. Discipline is a much more comprehensive word than punishment. It encompasses many elements such as linking the child to Allah, understanding the child's needs and qualities, knowing the critical factors involved in shaping the child's personality, emphasizing positive action, etc.[16] Punishment only occupies a very small portion of the discipline spectrum. Having said this, here is, in point form, the elements of what we consider proper and improper ways of discipline:

Improper

- Physical punishment
- Yelling and shouting
- Inconsistency
- Not teaching proper behaviour
- Disciplinary method not related to the mistake you're trying to correct
- Disciplinary method leads to low self esteem

If any of the above elements is contained in the disciplining mechanism used with the child, we consider it improper.

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[16] See Chapter two and chapter four of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, An Islamic Perspective* for more ways of discipline

Proper

- Teaches and trains for proper behaviour
- Doesn't create gap or hostile feelings between children and parents
- Strengthens the bond between children and parents
- Is related to the mistake being corrected
- Is consistent
- Leads to higher self esteem
- Contains elements to help ensure success, such as:
  - Follow up
  - Simple to apply
  - Applied fairly among all children when the same mistake is committed
- Older children are part of any decision-making process.

When the above elements are contained in the disciplining mechanism, we consider it proper.

Here is a practical example of a common situation as narrated by one of our daughters, who was 14 years old at the time of the incident:

"I remember once being punished for not using my time wisely. At that time, I felt it was almost unfair to be banned from TV for two weeks, but now I realize how important it was that I learned my lesson. My sister and I had been watching TV for two straight hours and hadn't yet prayed Maghrib. When my mother found out she told us to go and pray. When we finished our prayer, she asked: what do you think we should do to avoid such a thing from happening again? We agreed that we should be punished. She asked again: what kind of punishment do you think would help you to remember next time that prayer time should be respected and nothing should prevent you from praying on time? I suggested that we should be deprived of our allowance and my sister suggested that we could be deprived of our weekend treat.[17]

[17] This is a family tradition that every weekend, the kids are being rewarded by a certain treat of their own because of being good during the week

Mom said: these are good, but I have another suggestion that I think would work better in this case. I think you shouldn't be allowed to watch TV for a specified period. Do you want me to suggest the length of the period or do you want to do so? How long do you think this period should be? My sister and I talked together and came up with a period of two weeks. Mom agreed with us that we couldn't watch TV for two weeks, and that was our punishment. During these two weeks, my Mom monitored us closely and made sure that we didn't turn the TV on. During this time period though, both my parents gave me the support I needed and treated me normally. It was only I who could feel the consequences, because my parents' attitude towards me was as it always was. I think this punishment worked because it wasn't too harsh but at the same time it was still firm and appropriate for the situation. The punishment was more of a natural consequence because it was directly related to my ill-doing."

You note in this example that it almost meets all the requirements indicated above for the proper disciplining approach. It taught the children the proper behaviour, it was related to the mistake being corrected, the children, since they were teens, were consulted on the type of punishment used, and during the punishment period, parents respected the children and treated them kindly to ensure that the punishment did not create a hostile attitude from the children toward the parents, or widen the gap between them. The execution of the discipline mechanism was also closely followed up, and most importantly, it was done in a calm and dignified way to ensure that it had no negative impact on the teens' self esteem.

Environment

I Our children live here in North America where the culture is completely different from the eastern culture. How do we fuse the two contrasting cultures of the West and the East?

Answer The reader shouldn't be concerned about infusing the eastern culture in her children. She should rather be highly concerned about instilling Islamic concepts in the hearts, minds, and souls of her children. Not all eastern cultures are Islamic and agree with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*. Some aspects of them are, while others are not. As Muslims we should promote those aspects of the eastern culture that have their roots in Islamic teachings and completely reject those parts that go against Islamic teachings. There is also a third type of eastern culture, one that is neutral. It doesn't contradict Islamic values nor does it support them. This part of the culture should be tested in the new environment we are living in. If it works, we can use it. If it doesn't provide the required results for raising our children, no one can force us to use it just because it is part of the eastern culture.

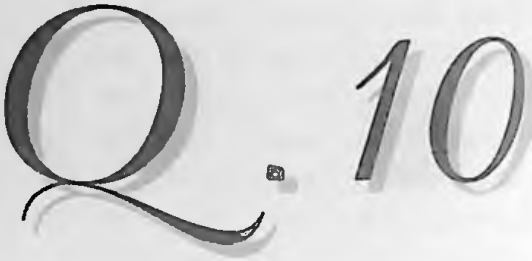
The same goes for the western culture. We shouldn't paint all aspects of the western culture with the same brush. There are good parts to the western culture that don't contradict Islamic values or go against our moral teachings such as respecting hard work, placing a high value on utilizing our time wisely (being punctual), and emphasizing the importance of organization to name a few. These values should be adopted and implemented by us. After all, we were told by the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*; "Good practices and actions are the goal of a believer, wherever he/she finds them, he/she is the most deserving of using them"[18]

[18] Al Termezy

On the other hand, there are many aspects of the western culture that go against our Islamic values, like drinking, drugs, gambling, pre-marital sex, etc. These practices should be completely avoided by Muslims, and parents should make it very clear to their children not to engage in such activities just because others in this society are engaging in them. Our main references are the orders of the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*. We should check every practice against them. If the practice agrees with them, there is no harm in doing it. If it contradicts them, we should fully avoid it. Of course, this is easier said than done. Because of this, it is very important and crucial for parents to work with their children on the following fronts:

- Instill important Islamic concepts in the mind, heart, and soul of your child as early as possible. See the answer to question number 3a and 3b in the first section of this book for the importance of starting early with your children when your approval is still the most important thing to them
- Work with the community (Islamic centers, youth centers, etc.) to establish positive and healthy activities that can be shared by our teens and occupy their time in a clean environment to help them avoid negative aspects of the western culture
- Be choosy and selective when you allow your teen/child to participate in main stream activities and monitor the effects of this participation on his/her behaviour
- Evaluate the situation periodically, and reconsider your decision if you notice a negative impact on your child's behaviour
- Don't generalize. Try to find out and assess the advantages and disadvantages of each activity and situation separately. Make your decisions with objectivity after considering the merits of each circumstance and condition.

The above are some tips to help parents train their children to integrate intelligently in the western culture and to make sure that they are benefiting from its positive aspects and avoiding the negative ones.



What is the main difference between parenting here, in the West, and parenting "there", in the East? Is this difference still prominent, as our Eastern societies are becoming more and more Western?

Answer

Although Eastern societies may be turning more and more Western because of the impact of Satellite TV Channels and the huge effect of Western programs being aired in Eastern societies, there are still basic differences between both societies, particularly in the area of raising children. These differences are mainly in the area of environment. As it was indicated by Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* in many of his teachings,[19] the environment has a huge and serious impact on forming a child's personality. Let us discuss in detail some of these environmental aspects that are causing this difference between raising children in the West compared to raising children in countries where Muslims are the majority:

- **TV programs**

  – Although the number of Western TV programs are increasing in the line up of most TV providers in Eastern countries, almost all TV providers in those countries also carry many specialized channels promoting clean Islamic values. This is not available in Western societies except on a very limited basis in certain areas of North America and Europe. These specialized channels, no doubt benefit parents in many ways by: portraying Islam

[19] See chapter three of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, an Islamic Perspective* third edition, 2004, by amana publications

properly, refuting certain misconceptions about Islam, and teaching various positive and healthy ways in dealing with children. Such opportunities are not available on a large scale for parents in the West. Parents living in North America and Europe have to exert a deliberate effort to acquire this knowledge. It is not readily available to them on TV programs, as is the case for parents who live in majority Muslim countries. In the West, parents have to travel and attend conventions to acquire such knowledge.

- **Mosques and The call for Prayers (*Adhan*)**

  – The presence of Mosques on almost every street and each corner of any city, town, or village in majority Muslim countries no doubt has a wonderful positive effect on Muslims in general and children in particular. The *Adhan* (call to prayer) can be heard regularly everywhere the child turns. Mosques have spread to every corner of the city, with scholars who are available to teach and answer questions almost 24 hours a day. Religious occasions are celebrated openly/publicly. Parents are not shy to identify with Islam, etc. On the whole, the atmosphere is very encouraging, peaceful, and supportive of anyone who chooses to adhere to and practice Islamic values (of course exceptions do exist, as in the harassment of dedicated Muslim groups by some governments). Not only are all of the above supportive enhancers absent from the life of Muslims in the North American environment, but furthermore, Muslims in these environments face additional negative stressors. These stressors are continuously being applied on Muslims or minorities, severely affecting children.

- **Peer pressure and popular teen culture**

  – This is one of the major differences between parenting in the West and parenting in majority Muslim countries, especially when parenting teens. Teens are in the second stage of approval seeking, where they are looking for the approval of their peers

and want to feel that they fit in, and that they are part of the main stream culture.

– The popular teen culture in the West calls for and emphasizes individuality, fulfilling desires, physical indulgence, following fashions, short-term gratification, and challenging authority represented in elders, teachers, and parents. Muslim parents try to instill Islamic values in their children. These Islamic values call for strong family ties, spiritual nourishment, carrying out duties, thinking about this life and the hereafter, and respecting authority.

– It is very clear that the popular teen culture in the West is almost completely the opposite of what Muslim parents want for their children. This represents a huge source of pressure for Muslim parents and Muslim teens living in the West.[20]

– There is no doubt that Muslims living in majority Muslim countries are not faced with the same type of pressure, or to say the least, with the same level of pressure when it comes to popular teen culture.

- **Religious holiday pressure:**

  – This type of pressure on Muslim parents living in the West and on Muslim children is not permanent by nature. It takes place periodically during the celebration of certain religious holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, which are observed by predominantly Christian North American and European societies.

  – Christmas time, by far, is a leading cause of pressure and stress for Muslim children. They are usually being bombarded by a series of questions from their peers as to why they are not celebrating Christmas: "It's lots of fun! Why don't you have a decorated Christmas tree at your house?", "You mean to say you're not getting presents in the holiday season?!", "So, why are you taking Christmas

[20] For detailed comparison between Popular teen's culture in the west and Islamic values, please refer to chapter 2 of our book *Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope* 2nd edition, amana publications, 2004

vacation if you are not celebrating it?", "You don't believe in Jesus?", "You're not having a big turkey for Christmas dinner?", "You are not writing a letter to Santa?"...etc.

– Similar questions are usually repeated during Easter. However, Christmas time is considered the worst for pressure, due to the commercial nature that color the celebration and the continuous media coverage, advertisements and the lengthy period of celebration.

– Again, unless parents neutralize the pressure caused by religious holidays to help children understand and cope with the situation, they form a great source of pressure on children and may have a serious impact on their upbringing.

– This type of pressure does not exist for Muslims living in majority Muslim countries.

- **Youth clubs and outlets**

  – One of the major problems for our teens and youth living in North America and Europe is how to spend their time engaged in clean, healthy, and entertaining activities.

  – Great numbers of Muslim teens in the West spend/waste their time surfing the internet, watching TV and movies, and playing video games. These types of activities are neither healthy, nor do they teach good skills. As a matter of fact, the majority of them promote violence and hostile attitudes towards others.

  – Recently, some Muslim communities in the West have established youth centers to overcome this problem. However, these centers are very limited and don't meet the needs or accommodation capacity of the great number of Muslim youth in need of such services.

  – Youth clubs and youth groups are popular in majority Muslim countries and provide invaluable services to this age group, engaging them in clean sports competitions, as well as other useful and healthy activities.

- **Harmonious society**

  In majority Muslim countries, the social behaviour of the general public is usually harmonious, homogeneous, and accepted by the rest of the society. Also, Islamic behaviour enhancers are plenty and constitute a great part of the support system for children. For example, there is always something related to Islam and its basic principles in the various media sources (books, newspapers, radio, and television). Also, Qur'anic recitation and Islamic subjects are always aired and discussed on radio and TV.

Q. 11

Nowadays, our kids spend a long time in front of their computers surfing the internet, and it is difficult to ask them not to spend such a long time on the internet. What can we do to make sure that they are not getting into bad sites and watching unacceptable material? Also, in your view, what are the effects of the internet on children?

Answer

First of all, let us agree that the internet is now a part of life for most people living in North America, and that the number of people who use it is increasing exponentially day after day for obvious reasons. It is a good tool for research, it is fast, and it can be used for many beneficial things in various areas of life. Simply put, it is a beautiful and efficient tool for research and communication for those who wish to use it as such. At the same time, like any other tool, the internet can be misused and the results of misusing it, particularly for young children, can be devastating. Because young children are vulnerable, they can easily get into trouble via internet use. As such, it is the parent's responsibility to do everything possible to protect their children from falling victims to any of the internet's many black holes. Here are some tips to help parents in this task:

- Parents should explain to children that the use of the internet is a privilege, not a right
- Establish a user agreement with your children and get them to sign it. Take your time discussing with your children the various terms of the contract as well as the different uses of the internet and the consequences of misusing it (getting into bad sites or

communicating with strangers over the internet). Make use of the model behaviour contract in chapter 9 of our book "Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope, Practical Parenting Guide." Parents should stick to the consequences established in this contract and be consistent in applying them

• Monitor computer usage and limit online time. Be aware of your child's need to use the computer for homework, research, and try to estimate how long it might take. Just sitting in front of the computer surfing the internet without a specific purpose, should not be permitted

• Make sure that the computer is placed in a common area of the house, not in the private rooms of the kids

• Have an old computer, with only word processing capability (no internet access), for children to use in their own bedroom. Children can do their internet research on the main computer located in a common area of the house, collect the needed information, copy it on a CD, then use this CD on the word processor computer in their rooms to finish their homework

• Invest in a software that blocks access to bad internet sites

Q. 12

How do you know if your child is undergoing (or maybe being effected by?) peer pressure and not telling you? Are there any particular signs to watch for?

Answer

Some signs that may indicate that your child is being influenced by/experiencing peer pressure are:

- Being bored and complaining that he/she doesn't know what to do with his/her time
- Watching a lot of TV
- Getting into fights with his/her siblings for no obvious reason
- Avoiding doing his/her homework or delaying it, and procrast
- Isolating him/herself
- In some extreme cases he/she may indicate that he/she hates school and doesn't want to go to school

However, when parents invest in the early years of their children by creating an open channel of communication, they can avoid such problems. The children usually open up to them and inform the parents of what is going in their life outside home.

A few factors that help in keeping a good, open channel of communication with your children are:

- ***Train yourself to be an active listener***: As explained in our book "Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, An Islamic Perspective", this means:

LISTEN
to the verbal messages and the body language of your children. Less than 20% of what is understood comes from the actual words used. We respond far more to tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions, body position, etc. (videotaping some family time together, with the permission of everyone involved, can be informative.)

REFLECT
(i.e. repeat back) what you believe your teen was saying and feeling without judging or trying to solve the problem. Allow the teen to elaborate.

CLARIFY
whether your understanding is correct or whether you have misinterpreted. Are there important details that you have overlooked?

EMPATHIZE
by trying to put yourself in the other person's position. It may help to try to recall a similar incident you have experienced. Tell your teen you understand and care about how he/she feels.

Remember, if your teen asks and seems to want help in dealing with a particular situation, then you may try to SOLVE THE PROBLEM by asking her what he/she thinks might help and if there is anything you can do. Be careful; don't impose the idea on your teen. Make a suggestion, and give your teen the choice to accept or reject it.

This sort of effective listening will not only ensure that you really hear what your teen is saying, it will signal to him/her that you can accept and understand all those other things he/she has wanted to share, and the real communication will begin.

When your teen feels that you're keen to listen to him and suspend your judgment as you do, he will be more attentive when you try to advise him on something or provide him with certain guidance. He will try his best to understand and implement the guidance given. This will help him eventually reach the stage of conviction, where he internalizes the advice, guidance and values given as his own.

• **Provide a warm, cozy family atmosphere.** An atmosphere that is filled with love, mercy, kindness, leniency, and gentleness encourages open communication between children and parents. In this kind of environment, children usually don't hide information from their parents because they feel their parent's love and know from the bottom of their hearts that their parents genuinely care for their well being and are ready to help them with any problem they may have.

Be involved in the life of your child. Make sure you visit her school, attend parent-teacher meetings, contact her teacher to ask about how she is doing, and offer to volunteer with class activities. This way, you will be able to detect if your child is under peer pressure.

Q. 13

My child, who is a teenager, is always asking me to buy him expensive brand name clothing. He says he's not less than other children so he should be able to wear what they wear. I always give in and end up buying them for him because the peer pressure. Am I doing the right thing or is there a better way of handling this issue?

Answer

This is a common problem and no doubt has to do with the environment our children are living in as well as the peer pressure they face. Teenagers highly value the views and approval of their peers. They like to dress like them, talk like them, walk like them etc. They don't want to be singled out of the group and looked at as different. One of the symptoms of wanting to fit in comes in the form of brand name clothing. Of course giving in to your teens' desire is not the solution, but at the same time, completely refusing to buy him the brand name item he wants is not the solution either. Here is a real example of how we dealt with this issue as described by one of our daughters when she was teenager. We trust that this example will help the reader in coming to terms with the "Brand Name" issue and provide some useful insight in reasoning and anger control, which could work wonders when it comes to dealing with teens.

Here is the example:

I stared longingly at the green and white Adidas jacket hanging in the store window. It looked really comfortable and the word "Adidas" printed across it diagonally was so strategically placed. I thought about how nice that Adidas jacket would look on me. I was in grade seven at the

time and almost all my classmates wore some sort of brand name item at least from time to time. Brand names are always going to be around bombarding a teenager. In the younger years, they're Adidas, Nike, or Fila; as you grow older, they change to Gap, Guess, Tommy Hilfiger, Club Monaco, Jacob, Old Navy etc. Before my eyes met this jacket, I really hadn't thought or cared much for brand names, but I had started to notice all my friends' wardrobes changing to accommodate brand names. Now I even knew this one girl who had Nike jewellery as well as the jacket, pants and shoes. Seriously, this girl had Nike earrings and a Nike ring. I decided to ask my parents if they could buy me the jacket as a present, for Eid. However there was one problem, this spring jacket was somewhere in the vicinity of $60, which was probably more money then my parents had ever paid for one of their spring jackets and I was only 13! My parents had always stressed the importance of being careful and responsible with your money, no matter how rich or poor you might be. They often mentioned the Prophet Muhammad PBUH's hadeeth about how we will be accountable for how we used the blessings that Allah has endowed us with, including money. At dinner that evening, I told my parents about the jacket that, to me, appeared so beautiful and asked them if they could buy it for me as my Eid present as Eid was soon approaching. And then the inevitable question was popped: they wanted to know how much this wonderful Adidas jacket cost and I dreaded having to respond. Very hesitantly, I answered "Umm...sixty dollars."

I braced myself, Oh no! Were they going to yell at me for even suggesting such a crazy thing, wasting $60 on a spring jacket when that money could most definitely be put to much better use. Well, no such response came. On the contrary, my parents were actually very calm as they explained to me that $60 was a lot of money and that it was probably that much just because it was a brand name jacket. But that response was not enough for me; it didn't satisfy that inner craving and desire for the jacket. The response was absolutely logical but I didn't want logic at that

time. I wanted that beautiful Adidas jacket that hung so nicely in the store window.

My parents could tell I was not convinced and I told them that I really wanted that jacket. I don't quite know why it was so important to me then. Maybe it was because all my friends had some brand name clothes and to me that jacket represented a sense of belonging or maybe I just really liked the jacket. Whatever it was, it wasn't going away and my parents realized that. My mom put the time and effort in to make the trip to the store with me and take a look at this jacket that she'd heard so much about. This was very important to me because it showed that my feelings and needs (though this was not a need per say) mattered to her. She cared about my desires, as absurd as they may be, and didn't make me feel bad about them. In the back of my mind, though I didn't want to admit it to myself, I knew that buying that jacket would be a waste of money and that I could get a non-brand name jacket of the same quality for half the price of this one. But did that matter to me at the time? Did that really matter to me as a 13 year old girl in junior high school? The jacket to me was a halal way of fitting in, of not standing out too much from the rest of my friends since there were already many things I did and wore differently that set me apart from the rest. My mother seemed to understand why I wanted this expensive jacket so badly. She explained, however, that brand names don't increase the worth of a person but that if I wanted it so badly, I must contribute to its cost. So we made a deal that we'd split the cost. My parents would pay for half of the jacket as a present for me for Eid and I would pay for the other half. Now, I paid for some of it using money from my allowance but you must remember that I was only 13 and I wasn't exactly swimming in money. So my mother told me that I could do extra work around the house to pay for my share of the jacket.

So I worked, I cleaned, I washed, I scrubbed, I fixed, all for my wonderful

jacket. Through my labors, I understood the value of money and I realized that it was really something not to be taken for granted, no matter how much of it you had. I developed an appreciation for the work my father did everyday, and he had much more to pay for than half the price of my Adidas jacket. When I had finally earned enough money, I went out and bought the jacket. Excited, I wore it to school the next day, but I realized that having a brand name printed across my back was not going to help me be a better person.

Ultimately, Adidas didn't care if I was the most or least popular girl at school, they just wanted my money. My friends didn't treat me any differently because now I had an Adidas jacket, sure I got a few compliments about my new jacket here and there but Adidas did not make me any nicer, smarter, or funnier – that was up to me."

Q. 14

We used to live in a large metropolitan area where Muslims are great in number and are well established in terms of the number of Islamic and youth centers available. We have three children: two boys and one girl, all in their early teens. They were very active with other Muslim teens in the youth center, playing sports and participating in various activities. Recently, because of my husband's career, we had to move to a small town in another state. The number of Muslim families in this town is very small and they only have a small place for Salat and no other activities. The closest large Islamic center is about one hour and a half drive from where we live. We try our best to make the trip once every two weeks on the weekends to give our children the opportunity to use the facilities in this Islamic center and to mix and play with other Muslim teens. This is not easy on us, but we try our best because our children really look forward to these visits. Occasionally, we may miss going on the trip for one reason or another, which leaves our children frustrated considering that during the week they are not participating in any activities. Our children are neither part of any extracurricular activities in their state schools now, nor do they participate in any local main stream programs because we fear that they may pick up some bad habit from these activities. Are we doing the right thing not allowing them to participate in main stream activities?

Jazakum Allah Khayran

Answer

There is no doubt that parents in North America have to be very careful of the type of environment their children are exposed to and interacting with. The environment plays a very crucial

role in shaping the personality of our children and, as such, we were warned by the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* in many of his sayings about the impact of the environment.[21] As a matter of fact, it is the responsibility of parents to make sure they surround their children with a healthy environment that will have a positive impact on their development. It is encouraging to see that this family tried their best to do this for their children while they were living in the metropolitan city, as well as when they moved to the small town. These trips every other weekend are not easy and require planning and a deliberate effort from parents which is to be commended.

However, surrounding our children with a good environment doesn't mean that we isolate them from the society they are living in for the following reasons:

- The Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* told us that "A believer who mixes with people and endures any harm they cause him has a greater reward than a believer who doesn't mix with people and doesn't endure the harm they cause him"[22]
- The Qur'an also encourages us to be kind and deal justly with our community, even if they are not Muslims, as long as they don't fight us because of our religion: "Allah doesn't forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily Allah loves those who deal with equity"[23]
- Muslims are an integral part of the North American community now. They have to contribute to the well being of their community and find the proper way to be part of the main stream society without compromising their values.

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[21] See chapter three of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, an Islamic Perspective*, third edition, amana publications.

[22] Ibn Magah

[23] (Q60, V8)

• Main stream activities are mainly funded by taxpayers. As Muslims we are part of this pool of resources and should also benefit from various main stream programs.

Having established this main principle that we are an integral part of the community, here are some guidelines to observe and keep in mind to help ensure safe and healthy participation for ourselves and our children:

• Not all mainstream activities are equal and not all mainstream groups are evil. As a matter of fact, most of them try their best to have their children engage in healthy and useful programs that would help their development and progress.

• Do your research and find out who is running what programs for youth in your locality. Public libraries and local officials are good sources of information in this area. Also talk to your neighbors and consult with them about the activities available in your area.

• Always pick the programs that are most beneficial to your children and are run by reputable individuals or groups.

• Try to enroll your children in programs before the start date so they won't feel like strangers when they join an activity that has already been running for some time and where participants already know each other well and may have formed their own friends and groups within the activity.

• If you don't find a suitable program for your teens and you have an idea for one that may benefit them, don't shy away from approaching those responsible for these programs to suggest starting one. Be willing to put the time to work out a plan to convince those in charge that it is an activity worth trying.

• In certain cases, you may need to ask your local representative to help you in starting these new programs. For example, if you feel the need for a ladies/girls only swimming time within the public swimming facilities, you can approach officials to start

such a program to accommodate this need for the whole community, not only for Muslims.

Meanwhile there are a few areas that you have to work on with your children to help them get the best out of the main stream programs without compromising any of their values. Here are some of these areas:

- Instill the proper values in your children and make sure they are proud of their identity as Muslims. This is not an easy task. It requires a lot of effort from parents.[24]
- Teach them how to interact with various situations and have a positive effect on their environment, rather than being effected negatively by the environment. This is closely linked to the above point about having a strong and confident Muslim Personality.
- Monitor and evaluate the effect of enrolling them in these main stream activities on their behaviour to make sure that there are no negative influences on them from being part of these activities. For example, monitor things such as the language they use (do they start to use foul, immodest language or swear words?), the way they respond to elders (are they respectful or do they show rudeness and disrespect?), the way they view famous singers, actors and athletes (ie do they seem to look up to negative famous figures whose actions go against Islamic values?), the way they deal with and talk about the opposite gender (ie do they email, or chat online with members of the opposite gender, or talk to them in a too-friendly manner?) etc.
- Adjust and modify your plans based on the results of your continuous follow up on the effects of the programs on your children's behaviour. Be prepared to make difficult decisions that may not be popular with your children.

[24] See the answer of the first question in this book to help you building confident and proud Muslim personality in your kids

Young Children

Q. 15

My two year old son is giving me a hard time. He has many problems I would like you to help me with. The first problem is related to him hitting me occasionally. I don't know how to stop this behaviour. Can you provide me with suggestions on how to stop this behaviour? The second problem is related to his sleeping habits. He doesn't want to sleep in his bed alone. He always wants to sleep in our room, and if I put him in his room he cries non stop so I end up bringing him back to our room. I would appreciate very much your help in these areas.

JAK

Answer

Regarding your son hitting you or others, this is a common behaviour for some two year old boys for one reason or another. However, if you don't deal with this behaviour, it is not going to be good for him now or later. Every time he does this you should deal with it very consistently. Don't let it happen a few times until you are frustrated at which point you scream or yell at him. Consistency is very important for these kinds of problems.

Here is how to deal with it:

Whenever he hits you, hold his hand gently but firmly, look him in the eyes, and say in a serious and assertive voice, but without yelling or shouting: "This hurts. Don't hit any body." Then tell him to say "I'm sorry" and get him to kiss you where he hit you. If you are consistent in doing this he will

learn that hitting hurts people and this behaviour should stop within a couple of months or so. We can't over emphasize the importance of being consistent, gentle but assertive when dealing with this matter.

Regarding your son sleeping in your bed rather than in his bed, we suggest the following:

You should decide on a bed time and try to be regular and consistent in following that time. A nighttime routine can help your son be ready to go to sleep with ease. About a half an hour to an hour before his bedtime, start getting your son ready to go to bed (that may mean feeding, bathing or washing him, and spending some time playing quietly with him with building blocks for example, or looking at a book with him). Then put your son in his bed and lie down next to him, reading Qur'an while putting your hand over his forehead or wiping over his head and body. After that you can play a tape or a C.D. of Quran recitation in his room and stay in the room with him quietly until he falls asleep, at which point you can leave the room quietly. Follow this routine for a while until he gets comfortable with sleeping in his own bed (it could take anywhere from two weeks up to a couple of months).

We also suggest that you use a baby monitor in his room. This will help you be aware if your son wakes up and cries in the middle of the night. If you hear him cry for about a minute, you should go to his room, put your hand on his head, kiss him, read him Qur'an in a steady, calm voice, comfort him and perhaps offer him a sip of water until he falls back asleep. Then go back to your room. You can also play the same Qur'anic tape at a low volume and leave it running. This way, rather than waiting until he comes to your room crying and then having a hard time getting him back to his room, you take care of him in his room to help him get into the habit of sleeping in his bed the whole night.

It is very important to make sure that the baby has had enough food during the day and is not hungry at bedtime. Make sure that you don't feed him something heavy before bedtime as it may make him thirsty and cause him to wake up frequently because he needs to drink.

After he gets used to sleeping this way (maybe after a month or two), you should be able to put him in his bed and read him Qur'an for a while, then leave the room even before he is asleep. He may cry for a while in the beginning, but as long as you are sure he is clean and fed, don't worry about him crying. He will fall asleep after a while insha Allah. You should continue to follow the same routine described above with the exception of having to lie next to him. A tape recorder playing Qur'anic recitation in is room can also help him.

ain, I would like to emphasize that consistency, staying calm but firm, id assertiveness when applying this is very important. For example, even if he runs out of the bed or the room, bring him back by gently pulling him if need be, without yelling or shouting at him or uttering such things as: "You're a bad boy, you're making me tired etc." Rather, you should say encouraging words such as: "You are a good boy and you will listen to mom and sleep in your bed."

In addition to the above, you should also make *Du'a* regularly and ask Allah to help you.

We know that this method usually works very well. Please keep in touch and let us know how it worked for you.

Q. 16

My son is a year and eight months old. I want to wean him off of breast milk. What is the best way of doing this? When he was one years old, I limited my breast feeding to nights only. Currently, he eats solid foods during the day. However, I'm not necessarily sure if he eats enough solid foods for his age. I breast feed him before he goes to bed and if he wakes up during the night. Usually he wakes up twice during the night. Sometimes he wakes up three times during the night.

JAK

Answer

It looks like your son doesn't get enough food/milk during the day and that is why he wakes up frequently during the night. At one years old, when you limited your breast feeding to nights only, you should have given him another feeding of milk by bottle or cup during the day.

Now what you could do is get him used to drinking milk from a cup (it could be a baby cup) for a month or two before you stop breast feeding him fully. When you are fully weaning him off of nursing, it will help that someone else be the one who gives him the last cup of milk before bed so he doesn't smell your milk and reject the bottle).

There is no easy way to avoid the baby crying for your breast milk when he is being weaned, but usually the child gets over it in a matter of a few days to a week. One idea that could help is to get him out of the house during the day time to a place where he has an opportunity to be active, move around, and run so he can fall asleep more easily at night.

Most moms need to drink and eat less when they stop breastfeeding. They also need to get involved in activities that consume their energy to exhaust them so that the body would stop producing milk. There are other ideas to help moms through this. Please consult with your physician on this matter for more specific and up-to-date advice.

We hope this helps *insha'a Allah*.

Q. 17

I'm a young mother who was just blessed with a baby boy three months ago. I'm a professional who used to work in the high tech industry before getting married and having my baby. As you know, most of the companies here in North America only allow a maximum of 9 months of maternity leave. This means that for me to be able to keep my good job with my high tech company, I have to put my child in a day care facility after my maternity leave ends. My son will only be 8 months old then. I feel that he would still be too young to be left in a day care or with a baby sitter. I'm afraid that this may have a negative impact on his development. However, I can't imagine myself leaving my very high paying job and staying at home to take care of my child. A you know, in the current job market it is not as easy to find jobs. It is considered suicidal for anyone to leave a good paying job in this market. I'm really puzzled and don't know what to do. Should I put my child in a day care facility or leave him with a baby sitter so I don't lose my job? Or would the damage be too much such that I should stay with him until he is three or four years old, then look for another job at that point in time? Jazakum Allah Khayran for your advice.

Answer

It is encouraging to know that our sister is concerned about the environment that will surround her young son particularly in the early years of his life. The prophet Muhammad *SAAW* warned us about the seriousness of the environment and its detrimental impact on the personality and the future of the young person in his very famous saying: "Each new born is born in a state of pure innate nature. His parents could convert him to be a Jew, or a Christian, or a fire

worshiper"[25] Parents represent the first and closest circle of environment surrounding the child and their impact on him is strong enough to make him change his pure innate nature and convert it to a different undesired way.

Because of the above, we feel that the child should stay with his parents during at least the first three years of his life. These are the most critical years of the child's life and most of his personality traits will be formed during these years. Also, the emotional bond between the child and the caregiver is mainly formed during these years. As such, our advice for the mother would be to stay home with your child and to take good care of him during these very valuable years of his development.

Now, what would the situation be if it were absolutely necessary for the mother to work outside the home and to place her son in a day care facility or to leave him with a babysitter? Here are a few precautionary measures that the parents should ensure:

- Make sure that the child is placed with only one babysitter for the whole period the mother will be away or in one good day care facility. Don't keep changing the babysitter or the daycare facility.
- Make sure that the babysitter or the caregivers at the daycare centre are good people whose ideas and thoughts are clean, proper, and healthy. They will be with your child for most of the day and most of the week. Your child will be highly affected by their way of doing things and his mind will be shaped by their thoughts, and he will be attached to them.
- Make sure that this babysitter is only taking care of a very limited number of children along with your child. No more than 3-4 children is reasonable, so that she will have enough time to give each of them the needed care.

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[25] Agreed Upon

• Don't leave the child with the babysitter or in the daycare for more than four hours daily.
• The child has to spend enough time with his parents everyday after he comes back from the daycare or from the babysitter's place. This means that the parents have to make sure that they secure enough time to spend with their child, interacting with him, and not just fulfilling his physical needs. Parents need to make sure that the time they spend with their child is contributing positively to building this very important bond between them and their child.
• The babysitter or the daycare facility should be using the same language used at home, otherwise the child will be confused and may face some problems developing his language skills.
• Finally, it is absolutely crucial that there will be no activities in that daycare facility or at the babysitter's place that reflect negatively on the child or contradict the belief system of the parents.

Q. 18

I am trying to teach my five and a half year old son about Islam and Allah. I had a hard time answering him when he asked me where Allah is and why he cannot see Allah. I asked him, "Can you see the air you breathe that helps you live?"

Answer

Let us take a moment to commend you on the excellent analogy you gave your child to help him understand that not everything that exists can be seen. When a parent teaches a child about the Creator, the task is made easy because it meets the natural *fitrah* (intuitive sense or pure innate nature) of the child. However, to reinforce this concept, you need to address it repeatedly using many different methods. For example, on a sunny day you could call your son to the sunlight, pat a pillow in the sunlight, and let him see all the little dust particles that appear in the sunbeams. Then you could take that same pillow and go to a shaded area and do the same thing and then ask him where the dust is in this case? Point out that, although the dust is not seen in the shaded area because the sun light is not there, the dust still exists and is still there.

You can also give an analogy for how our minds are not capable of knowing or imagining what Allah *SWT* is like and our eyes are not capable of seeing Allah *SWT*. Use the analogy of a little ant that is standing by the side of your boy's foot, and then ask your son: "Do you think the ant can imagine your whole body or what you can see or feel just by standing beside the side of a little part of your foot? Can the ant imagine that you have a big foot and that there is a leg above your foot? Can the ant imagine the color of

your foot? Can the ant imagine the body above your leg and your head? Can the ant imagine what your eyes and face look like? Can the ant imagine what is going on in your mind right now (like what you did today and your plans for tomorrow and for the future)? The ant is a creature of Allah *SWT* and you are a creature of Allah *SWT*. While both of you are creatures, you are so great and magnificent to the ant to the extent that the ant is not capable of seeing all of you or imagining all of you. If the ant is unable to fully know and understand you when you are both creatures, how are we supposed to fully know and understand Allah *SWT* who is the creator and not the creature? We are not capable of seeing Him or imagining what He looks like. Allah has created our mind and our senses to help us live and deal with our life on earth. He did not create our mind and our senses to be able to see or imagine Him. In the Hereafter insha Allah, Allah will give those who go to paradise senses that are capable of seeing Him. This will be the highest pleasure we can attain as humans. So direct your son's attention to working his way towards paradise so he can enjoy seeing Allah *SWT* there. Try to follow the Prophet's advice *SAAW* when he told us to think about th creation of Allah and not the nature of Allah. So use every opportunit whenever you are eating or out in the park, to remind your son that we are surrounded by the creation of Allah and how magnificent it is.

Q. 19

I often find myself feeling very frustrated when my four year old asks me a lot of questions. The frustration I feel leaves me in bad shape. How should I deal with my situation, considering that she is my only child?

Answer

Questioning by children is a normal way for them to explore their environment and learn about the many things around them. Children are curious and it is through asking questions and hearing their responses that they fulfill their curiosity and learn. Parents should be happy that their children are asking them questions. It is a sign of intelligence and it is an opportunity for the parents to instill the right concepts and the proper Islamic values in the minds and hearts of their children.

It is quite unfortunate that there is a misconception that a child who asks a lot of questions is being impolite. Parents should change their attitudes toward this issue of asking questions. What we have to make sure of is that the child is asking the questions in a polite and respectful way.

If the child asks a question, it means that s/he is ready to learn about the subject he is asking about. Of course the language and the level of knowledge communicated to the child by parents should be suitable for his/her age group. Children may also ask questions because they are bored due to a lack of activity in their lives. Being the only child may contribute to this boredom. For you to solve such a problem, you have to provide the child with certain activities, like going to the park and allowing them to interact with other children more often.

The mother could be frustrated with her child's questions because she may not know the answer to all the questions. In this case, there is nothing wrong with telling the child that you will try to find out the answer to her question. A good way of doing this could be to read a book about the subject your child raises. Another thing that could be frustrating the mother is the timing of the questions. She may be busy doing other tasks when the child asks a question and, in this case, there is nothing wrong with telling the child that you will discuss it later or address the issue later in the day. However, if you can put aside the other task for a while and address the child's question that would be better. In general, parents should change their attitude toward children's questions and be happy that their children are asking questions and trying to acquire the proper knowledge to respond to such questions.

Q. 20

I have been trying to potty train my son, who is 2 years and three months old, for about 4 to 5 months. When we go out daily he wears diapers but at home I take the diaper off even though he does not tell me when he needs to urinate or defecate. When he urinates he does so openly, but when he defecates he always goes and hides in a particular closet and does it there. When he does this, should I force him to defecate in the potty

Answer

Toilet training is an important step in teaching a child responsibility. It should be taken seriously and done properly so it does not leave the child with any negative feelings. Toddlers are physiologically ready to be toilet trained around the age of two. They should not be treated harshly, blamed or be made to feel ashamed throughout the process of toilet training. To start the training, it is advisable that the mother free herself of other responsibilities so she can be home with the child for a period of one to two weeks. During this period of time, her focus should be on the child and not on any housekeeping. She should have a potty ready at home in an area of the house where there is no carpet. Also, she should place some books, toys (like play dough) and coloring pencils in this same area. She should spend this period of time primarily in the area where the potty is located. In the morning, she should take the child's underwear off and let him wear a long T-shirt or dress that reaches his knees. Then invite the toddler to sit on the potty in a nice way, telling him that you know he is a good kid and that he will soon be going on the potty. If the child resists, take a soft toy like a teddy bear, seat it on the potty and playfully display how the bear

is good for going on the potty. Take some water in a cup and pour it in the potty and say that the teddy bear has done it in the potty. Take the teddy bear off the potty and hug and kiss him. Then tell your child that it is his turn to sit on the potty. Make the child sit for about ten minutes, if the child becomes restless and wants to leave, play with him or read a story for him to keep him on the potty. If it happens that the child urinates in the potty, then make a big deal about it by hugging him and encourage him by telling him that he is a big boy and that you're going to tell his dad and brothers/sisters. The encouragement that you give your child should be very exaggerated to keep him going throughout the process of potty training. After giving the child a break for a half hour to one hour, then you should put him back on the potty and repeat the whole process. It would help if you allow your child to drink lots of water and juice during this training period. One common scenario with toddlers during this training period is that they sit on the potty for a long time and then once they get off it, they urinate on the floor somewhere. If this happens, the mother should not get angry; she should just take a cloth, give it to the toddler and tell him to clean up the mess he made. At the same time, sh should take the teddy bear again, hug and kiss him and pour some wate in the potty and say that he is good for doing it in the potty. Continue this process on a consistent basis until the child learns how to regulate himself. Once the child learns how to control his one function (urinating), the other one will follow.

Insha Allah, if you follow this procedure carefully, I think that your son will learn how to control himself. Once he is trained at home in using the potty properly, you should follow this up with taking the diaper off of him when he goes outside and using pull-up underwear and letting him use the toilet frequently when he is outside. The same goes for when he goes to bed.

Q.21

I have a child who is 3.5 years old and a six month old baby. Every time I go shopping at the super market while they are with me I end up shouting, yelling, and sometimes even spanking my 3.5 year old. He embarrasses me and makes the shopping trip a miserable experience for me. He keeps bringing items from the various shelves of the store and putting them in our shopping cart. I tell him not to do that, but he never listens. When I yell at him or spank him, he starts crying very loudly and then I feel very bad and embarrassed because of his crying. Because of this, I usually yield to his wishes and buy some of the stuff he puts in the shopping cart. I don't know what to do with him. Can you please advise me to a clear course of action that I should take to solve this problem? Jazakum Allah Khayran.

Answer

This is a common problem at this age, particularly when parents are not consistent in dealing with the problem and don't provide early training followed by applying the necessary consequences.

Here are some suggestions that we can offer our sister to help in solving this problem:

- Plan your shopping trips to allow for enough time to repeat the trip so that you have the option of cutting the trip short if your child misbehaves in the store. This is important in order to teach him that there are consequences for his actions. You should be doing this regularly until he learns his lesson. As such you have to give yourself enough time for all these trips because you may need to make your shopping trip a few times rather then once to drive the point home that if he misbehaves, you really will leave the store.

• Make sure you are rested and calm before the shopping trip so you won't be easily agitated with your child's behaviour in the store and so you can avoid yelling and shouting in response to his misbehaving. To achieve this (being calm and in control) you may seek the help of your husband or a family member to give you the opportunity to get enough rest. If no family member lives close by, cooperating with a neighbor to mutually help each other with the children could help in this area. Also, enrolling the child in a preschool or a day care for a few hours a day could also be a viable option.

• Talk to your child before going shopping. Let him know that in the store you expect him to behave nicely (not to run, not to remove merchandise from the shelves except with your permission, etc.) Let him know that he has the option of walking next to you in the store or sitting in the shopping cart. Also let him know that if he doesn't follow your instructions and do as you say in the store, you will cut the shopping trip short and take him back home. Promise him that if he behaves properly in the store you will allow him to pick one or two items he likes and buy it for him.

• Suppose your child agrees to walk quietly beside you in the store and so you allow him to pick two items of his choice at the end of the trip as a treat. If he starts picking up other items other than the two he is allowed, don't shout or yell at him to put them back. Rather, take him by the hand to the shelf and ask him gently but firmly to put the items back. If he is reluctant to do so, help him with words of encouragement such as: "You are a nice boy. The nice boy puts back the items on the shelf. Here, mom will help you", and carry the item with him back to the shelf.

• Every time your child behaves properly during the shopping trip, remember to praise him for his good behaviour and occasionally reward him.

• Some stores have designated areas for children to play in. Try to do your shopping in one of these stores and make sure you allow your child to spend sometime in the play area before you start shopping.

- If you have a neighbor who has children around the same age, try to coordinate your shopping trips together. Each of you can prepare her shopping list before going to the store. At the store, one of you could do the shopping for both and the other could supervise the children in the play area.
- Be consistent in applying the above tips and try not to lose control of your temper at all. Never yell or shout at your child, but repeat your instructions to him firmly in an assertive voice but gently at the same time.
- To help keep your child busy or entertained throughout your shopping trip, allow him to help you in collecting certain (unbreakable) items from your shopping list. For example, you can ask him to pick up that bag of bread off the shelf and put it in your cart etc. This will help keep him occupied so he doesn't have a chance to wander around and grab other items that you don't want or need.

Q.22

How can you communicate a message to young children with their short attention span? I feel like they don't focus on any issue or pay much attention to me when I speak with them. I feel it is very difficult to get them to understand what I want from them and make them follow up on what we agree upon. Can you please advise me on this important issue? Any practical suggestions would be highly appreciated. Jazakum Allah Khayran

Answer To communicate a message to children, although they have very short attention spans, parents should ensure the following:

- Have a clear set of rules in place and apply them consistently across the board without exception.
- Explain these rules to the children using very simple language that they can understand.
- Repeat the explanation, if needed, more than one time until these rules and their application become part of the children routine.
- Follow up closely on the behaviour you want to change and monitor its progress.
- Evaluate the situation frequently and assess the results of applying these rules on the issue you want to correct.
- Modify your rules, if need be, based on the evaluation and assessment of each problem.

Here are some examples of rules that may help you in getting your message across:

• No TV before homework is complete
– In a very clear and assertive way, parents should explain to their children that they are not allowed to watch TV before they finish their homework
– If at any time your child turns the TV on before finishing his/her homework, remind him/her of the rule and quietly turn the TV off
– If you have more than one child, set an approximate range of time by when they are supposed to have finished their homework by. After this range, even if one of them hasn't finished his/her homework, allow the rest of the children to watch TV while making sure that you are providing a proper quiet environment for the other child to finish his/her homework
• You can only play for five minutes if you work for at least 10 minutes.
– This could be applied for homework and house chores as well. For example, if the child does chores for 10 minutes, then he can take a five minute break for play before continuing.
• Visiting friends takes place only on the weekends and after taking permission from parents
• Etc.

to be consistent in applying the rule and the children will get the sage and it will insha Allah become part of their routine.

:o get your message across that, for example, homework is important, n to your child and remind him/her that if s/he does her/his homework, will get a better job when s/he grows up. Also tell him/her that as a result . completing homework, doing well in school, and getting a better job, s/he will have more money to buy what /she wants and to live comfortably.

Q. 23

I have two children. Ahmed is six and Faheemah is four. In order to teach them to share and not be selfish, we make all the toys common for both of them. They still fight frequently about a toy or a book and once one of them holds a toy the other one wants it.
What can we do?

Answer Fighting between children is normal at this age. They will always find something to fight about. As such, making all the toys common at home won't solve the problem since they will find other reasons to fight. Also, when you make all toys common at home you are not fulfilling one of the human instincts that is recognized by Islam; this is the right of individual ownership. In addition, our kids can't learn to share unless they own something to share. If all the toys and books in the house are common, we are not solving the problem of fighting, rather we are depriving our children from having opportunities to learn very good social skills that are needed for their healthy development.

Parents' duties toward children's fights are to:

- Make sure that these fights don't become rough and lead to bodily harm. Monitor them and never allow them to escalate beyond a certain level, particularly if one of the children is much older, stronger or heavier than the other child. Children's safety should be at the top of the parents' priority list
- Not take sides so that the kids don't feel that you are favoring one of them over the other. The way you interject to solve the problem will have a lot to do with this
- Ensure that fights don't leave a lasting negative effect on your children's relationship that could lead to them hating each other. Your goal is to make sure that your children grow up to love and

care about each other. Again, the way you step in to help in solving the problem can impact how your children feel about each other

- When fights between your children occur, use the occurrence as an opportunity to teach them proper conflict resolution methods

Here are some suggestions for how to solve the problem of fighting between your two children:

- Set very clear rules of ownership. If the toy belongs to one child, he or she has the right to allow or not allow the other child to use it.
- If the toy is common (ie, does not belong to a specific child) make sure that equal sharing is the rule. Set a specific time, 2-5 minutes for example, for each child to use the toy.
- Don't rush to solve the problem for your children. Give them enough time to resolve the situation themselves. If you decide to interfere, don't impose a solution; just guide them towards coming up with the solution themselves.
- Deal with your children equally. Don't favor one child over the other because of age.

Q.24

Is there any particular supplication (Dua'a) that we can make for our children? Please refer to the Qur'an.

Answer If the reader means supplications to protect our children and hope that they will grow up to be good Muslims, the Qur'an certainly includes such supplications, as follows:

- "O Allah, grant us from our spouses and our off spring that which would sooth our eyes and make us leaders for those who observe their duties toward Allah"[26]
- "O Allah make us and our off spring submit fully to you and show us our rituals and accept our repentance"[27]

Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* indicated to us specific supplications said when we congratulate a person who is blessed with a n He instructed us to say; "May Allah bless your new born whom I to you, and may you thank Allah, and may the new born reach maturity, and may you be blessed with the best of him"[28]

[26] (Q 25, V74)
[27] (Q 2, V 128)
[28] Al Azkar Al Nawaweyah, ed. 2.06

Pre Teens

Q.25

My son is 9 years old. He is a good kid. He obeys us as parents, loves Islam, and is proud to be Muslim. He often asks me about what he should and shouldn't do? Alhamdulellah, I spend enough time with him explaining what is wrong, and what is right. He loves to talk to his non-Muslim neighbors and schoolmates about Islam. However, it looks like he is always telling them that "You are wrong and I'm right. You will go to Hellfire and I'll go to Paradise." I came to know about this because one of my neighbors told me what he told her son. I'm disturbed and I don't know what to do. I love that he is a devoted Muslim, but I don't want him to speak to the neighbors' kids or to his classmates in this manner which may turn them away from him. Please advise me on what to do?

Answer The attitude referred to in this question is not uncommon among a certain percentage of our young children living here in North America. It is an indication that these kids are proud of their identity as Muslims, but at the same time, that they lack the understanding of certain Islamic concepts related to the proper manners of dealing with others, as well as basic Islamic concepts associated with being a true Muslim. It is the parent's duty to make sure that they teach their children these important concepts and manners. Here are some points parents should emphasize with their children to avoid such a problem:

- Remind your child of the concept of having the proper motive (intention?) for any action (*Neyah*). As was emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* in many of his teachings, it is an absolute must that we have the proper intention for any of our actions to be accepted by Allah *SWT*. Our intention should always be to please Allah *SWT* and not to brag about our achievements or lifestyle. Speaking to others in the way indicated in the

question may risk the acceptance of our good deeds by Allah *SWT*.

• Review your actions at home and find out if you are doing or saying anything that could lead your children to behave in this manner with non-Muslims. For example, ask yourself how you refer to your neighbors when your child asks you to do something that they are doing and he is not allowed to do. Do you say, "We don't do this because we are Muslims but they are *Kuffar* so they can do this?" If this, or something similar, is what you say to your child, then he/she could develop an attitude of looking down on non-Muslims that you described in your question. It is crucial that parents observe what they do and say about the main stream society we are living in. It is recommended by the Qur'an and by the Prophet's teachings that we be kind to non-Muslims and do good to them.[29]

• Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* instructed us to be very good to ou neighbors. Mention some of his sayings to your child and discu with your child how you can put the advice from these saying into practice. One of his important sayings in this area is, "Arc Angle Jabril continued to advise me regarding neighbors to the extent that I thought he would ask me to include my neighbors in my inheritance."[30]

• Remind your child that arrogance and boasting are two very bad qualities that are not liked by Allah *SWT*. The main fault of *Shaytan* was, and still is, arrogance. He was cursed and deprived from *Jannah* because of his negative sense of pride and because of viewing himself as superior to others.

• Remind your child that we are not responsible for judging people. Muslims should leave this matter to Allah *SWT*. You can use verse number 17 in Surah number 22 to support your argument.

• Talk with your child about the importance of being nice to our non-Muslim friends as a way of inviting them to the beautiful way of life, Islam. Let him know that when we conduct ourselves in a bad

[29] (Q 60, V 8)
[30] Ibn Muagah

manner, accuse others, and put them down, they wouldn't like to be in our company. However, when we conduct ourselves in a good manner with others, it leaves a positive impression on them and they will be happy to see us again and to speak with us and spend time with us. This will give us more opportunities to discuss the principles of our way of life with them and will leave the door open for more dialogue in this area. Remind him of the advice of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* that we have to observe our duties towards Allah *SWT* wherever we are, that we have to follow a bad deed with a good one so it may wipe it out, and that we have to deal with others in a good manner.[31] Also remind your child that the reward of guiding some one to Islam is so immense that the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* said, "If Allah were to guide only one person to the Right Path through your efforts, it is better for you than the whole world."[32]

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[31] At Termezy
[32] Agreed Upon

Q.26

We have three children: 11, 9, and 7 year old boys. We have a problem with our 9 year old boy. He feels that we are favoring his siblings (older and younger) over him. We feel we are fair to all of them and we don't know why he feels this way. I don't think that we are doing anything to make him feel this way. I keep telling him that we are not favoring his brothers over him, that it is just something in his mind, and that it is not fair that he says this about his parents. I tell him he should forget about these feelings he has because they are not real and that he should be like his brothers who don't say that we are favoring others over them.

Is this a common problem for the middle child of the family? Are we handling it the right way? If not, what should be done?

JAzakum Allah Khayran

Answer

More often than not, this type of problem may oc for middle children. The way you are handling situation is not helping your child feel that you are treating all of th equally. From your question, it appears that you are mainly concer with proving that you are not guilty of favoritism, and not as mu concerned with getting to the bottom of the problem and finding out w your son feels this way. If he perceives that you are favoring his broth over him, this means that most probably you are favoring his broth (even just a little) over him. You should be more concerned with h feelings than with proving him wrong and rejecting his complaint. Here is what we suggest you do:

- Firstly, don't quickly dismiss your son's complaints and act like nothing is wrong. Avoid mentally denying this issue.
- Assure your son that you love him as much as you love his

other siblings. You can give him a big hug and a kiss whenever he is sitting close to you and say: "I really love you very much."

• Talk to your son and try to find out why he is having these feelings. Ask him clearly to tell you what makes him feel that you are favoring his siblings over him.

• Be a good listener and don't disregard any claim he has. Consider everything he says.

• Some of his claims could just be misperceptions by your son because of certain observations he has made. It is your duty as a parent to make sure that the child's conclusions based on certain observations are correct and proper.

• Take the findings of your discussion with your son seriously and have a plan to work on them to make sure you get the required results.

• Meanwhile, check your behaviour toward him and his siblings and see where you can improve. The process of self search and self improvement explained in detail in the first section of this book could provide you with the practical steps to help improve your parenting behaviour toward this child.

Q.27

There is this kid who is always picking on my son. He calls him names and hits him almost every time he sees him. He is 8 while my son is 7 years old, but both are 2nd graders in different schools now. They used to be together in the same school for 2 years and I always heard my son complaining that "X called me stupid", "X hit me", etc. The problem is that the kid's father is someone I know, but I always feel that he doesn't tell his son to stop.

I've always told my son to be nice, and have good Islamic manners. I also tell my son to tell the boy's dad when the boy hits him, but I am almost ready to tell my son to do it the "old fashioned" way. (ie: if he hits you, hit him back, if he says you are stupid, say it back to him, etc.) The last ordeal happened yesterday. I tried to talk to the boy's dad, but he said that his son did nothing wrong, so I said I would start asking my son to deal with his son the old fashioned!

Sometimes, I think avoidance would be the best strategy and that I she just keep them away from each other and minimize our interac with this family for now, but I think this is wrong and I also thi "old fashioned" way is wrong. So, what do you recommend? I am st have been asked this question a lot in the past.

Jazakoum Allah Kheir for your advice.

Answer Here are some points for your consideration:

• Unfortunately, you are correct that this is a common problem that most young boys will face at one stage or another while growing up. As such, avoidance is not a good idea. You may avoid contact with this specific

boy or family, but another boy could start doing this. You have to face the problem and try to find a solution for it. Avoidance doesn't provide you with the opportunity to train your son how to face problems while he is still under your supervision. He needs the training because it is not a perfect world out there and he may face similar problems again where the experience he gained from his training will prove to be of great help to him insha'a Allah.

• It is normal for boys around your son's age to fight for their position within the group. Usually, they try to establish some sort of ranking system within the group and everyone tries to find a place for himself within this ranking system. The group wants to clearly know the position of every one within this system. A person who is high in the ranks is popular and has more friends, while a person who is low is an easy target for abuse and is readily ridiculed. It is not easy for a young boy to be the target of such abuse and it could have a negative impact on his self- esteem.

• It is good that you are telling your boy to be nice and behave with good manners. There is no doubt that as parents we need to instill this in our children's personalities. However, this shouldn't be a reason for them to be bullied and ridiculed. We can teach our sons not to start a fight and not to be aggressive and hit other boys, but at the same time, we have to rain them to defend themselves and teach them a good strategy to deal with such situations whenever they occur. You can teach your son to do the following when another child hits or pushes him:

– Train your son to say loudly in an angry voice: "Don't hit me. That hurts!"

– Let him repeat this quickly three or four times with the same angry tone of voice and as loud as he can without shouting.

– If the other person doesn't stop right away, your son should start pushing him back away from him and even hit him back if he can.

– If it happens again, your son should push the other kid away while he is angrily saying: "Don't hit me. It hurts."

– At home, the father or the mother should try to train the child on how to hit back by occasionally playing rough with him during the children's play time at your home.

– When this happen in the school, out of respect for the school system, your child should first try to solve the problem by taking it to an adult in the school such as a teacher or a social worker if they are available. Only if the adult fails to take action then the child should start hitting back. Because at schools, they usually don't consider who started the fight, but punish both people who participated in it as long as there was an adult present on duty that the child could have gone to for help.

• We realize that this may be difficult for your son to do particularly if he was not trained to do this from a young age. However, it is important for him to start doing this now and not to wait anymore.

• Some kids may learn how to stand up for themselves faster than others. It may take a few trials for your son since he was not trained to do this from an early age. Don't get discouraged if you don't get immediate results. Encourage your son to continue dealing with the aggressor in this way and you will see results *insha'a Allah*.

• Monitor the progress and assess the situation frequently. Continuousl encourage your son to stand up for his rights. If you feel that this is affec ing his self-esteem negatively, try to create situations during the trainin period to shelter him from feeling incapable of defending himself.

• Don't sever your ties with the other family. Stay on OK terms w them.

• Make lots of *Du'a* to Allah *SWT* and pray "*Salatul Hajjah*" occasionall asking Allah to help your son get over this problem and guide the children of all Muslims to do the right thing.

We hope this helps insha'a Allah.

Q.28

I have four children, a 9 year old boy, a 6 year old girl, a 3 year old girl, and a one year old boy. I have a problem with my 9 year old son. He often gets angry and upset and deals with me in a disrespectful way. He is doing OK with his regular schoolwork but he protests whenever I ask him to do his Arabic homework or memorize the Qur'an. He wants to play all the time, and he frequently asks me to buy him new clothes, games, and toys. Whenever I try to explain to him the reasons why we are not going to buy these things, he protests, becomes rude, and keeps demanding that we buy these things. I really don't know how to deal with him and I need some advice so our relationship doesn't get ruined.

Answer

At the age of 9 years old, the child becomes observant of what other kids at his age do and have. Often, they want to imitate their classmates in an attempt to feel that they belong to the school environment. As such, the child may often come home and ask his parents to buy him different things like a brand name jacket, shoes, or a particular game. Whenever the parents don't agree, that poses a problem for the child who doesn't know how to belong except through what he wears and has.

Dealing with such a situation needs to be done in a rather comprehensive way as a simple 'NO' may not work. Parents need to put themselves in the child's shoes and let him know that they know how it feels for him to be surrounded by kids whose focus in life is mainly to buy fashionable clothes and the latest entertainment gadgets. Parents should use such opportunities to educate the child about the Islamic understanding of wealth, money, and spending in general. They should explain to him that

it is a responsibility that every Muslim should take seriously as Allah *SWT* will ask them about how they earned their money/wealth and how they spent it. The use of the following saying of the Prophet *SAAW* will help parents illustrate their point in a very clear, beautiful and firm way:

"Every servant of Allah will be asked on the Day of Judgment about four things: how he used his life, how he used his youth years, how he earned his money and spent it, and how he used his knowledge."[33]

Parents should explain this Hadeeth to their child and describe the events of the Day of Judgment and how everybody will be anxious and terrified in the highest court of justice in front of Allah until the process is over and their case is settled. Parents should make sure that the child gets the message that this is a horrific day and it is not a joke or to be taken lightly. We should all be prepared for this day by doing the right things in every aspect of our lives.

[33] At Termezy, and At Tabarany

Q.29

My daughter is 7 years old. Her mind is always occupied with popular toy figures such as Barbie and the like. She asks me to buy these collections of toys for her and she compares the way she looks with the way these toys look. She complains about her hair being frizzy rather than straight and about her skin being dark rather than fair. I always tell her that she should be thankful for what she has and stop asking for these things. But she continues to ask me and complain about her features. Any advice on how to deal with this matter?

Answer Here are some important points for you to consider and make use of that can, insha Allah, help your child to have confidence in herself and develop a strong personality:

- Train the child from a very young age to say the *du'aa* "Praise be to Allah *SWT* who fashioned me and gave me my beautiful look"[34] so that she learns that she is blessed with her looks.
- Train the child to also say the *du'aa*: "O`Allah, as you have perfected my looks, please perfect my manners."[35] This saying of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* reminds us as parents of the importance of instilling the vital concept that the character of a person matters more than how they look.
- Teach your child the very wonderful saying of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, "Allah doesn't look at your figure but he looks at your hearts and deeds"[36]
- Explain to your child the gimmicks behind the toy and advertisement industry, clarifying to her that they are only after

[34] Al Azkar Al-Nawaweiah
[35] Ahmad
[36] Muslim

making money and that they are not into promoting goodness or being fair to all people. We should be smart and not get deceived and fall into their trap. If we do, we are just wasting our resources (money) and letting those controlling these industries suck our wealth from us.

• Allow the child to own a few of these popular toys so she doesn't feel deprived and is more receptive to your explanation.

• You can be innovative in trying to direct the child's attention to other toys and games that will be fulfilling to her and at the same time divert her attention away from the advertised toy industry. For example, you can make simple toys with her with the help of public library books that give instructions on how to make a bed for Barbie out of a fruit box, or how to knit, etc.

• Minimize the time your child spends in front of the TV. Make TV watching on special occasions such as family get together and try your best to make them watch only useful material in your presence and under your supervision. This will give you the opportunity to explain to them on the spot whenever there is a issue to be clarified.

• Try to rent educational DVDs and videotapes to replace T watching. You will have better control of the content of a program with videotapes and DVDs compared to TV. In addition, this way you can avoid commercials bombarding your children with each and every TV program they watch.

Teenagers

Q.30

I'm a very active mother who tries to attend Islamic annual conventions and regional conferences regularly. I noticed that alhamdulellah, the organizers and program committees of most of these gatherings try their best to have programs accommodating our teens and youth. This is a very good trend. However, this only happens a few times a year during these gatherings. The rest of the year, most of our Muslim teens and youth are not spending their time wisely in their communities. A great number of them spend their time playing video games, surfing the net, chatting in chat rooms, and watching TV. I feel it is very important to get our teens and youth involved in community activities and projects. What do you think about this? Can you please advise parents as to the importance of teen activism and what lessons it instills in the person? Jazakum Allah Khayran

Answer We really appreciate this question very much and thank our sister for raising this issue and giving us an opportunity to talk about this very important subject.

Being active and involved for the greater good and well-being of our societies in particular and humanity in general is a very good quality that is highly recognized by Islam. As such, the teachings of Islam promote an active and healthy life style. Here are some of the Qur'anic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* related to this matter:

- It was reported that Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* said; "The best of people is the one who benefits others most"[37]
- It was also reported by Ibn Omar *RAA* that Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* said: "A person who mixes with people and is patient with the

[37] Al Jame' Al-Sagheer

harm that touches him due to this mixing, is better than a person who doesn't mix with people and doesn't exercise patience with them."[38]

• Another beautiful saying of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* related to this issue is: "The reward by Allah of a person who brings happiness to a household through his/her contribution is none but Paradise"[39]

• We conclude the sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* with this beautiful one: "If The Hour (indication to the beginning of the Day of Judgment) was to start and one of you is holding a small palm tree in his hand and he could plant it, let him/her go ahead and plant it"[40]

Because of all of the above advice, we always recommend in our parenting and teen's workshops that parents should strive hard to provide their childre with the opportunity to live an active life style at home, within the comm nity, and within the main stream society. Providing our children with active and healthy life style and getting them involved in fruitful projects a activities is no doubt a great thing to do and we will be rewarded immen ly for it because of the following:

• It is a direct act of obedience to Allah's orders and His messeng teachings
• It has a very healthy and positive impact in developing rounded, strong personality in our children. It also has a gre on our children's self esteem.
• It occupies our children's time and saves them from directin energy toward trivial activities that could negatively affect personalities
• It contributes positively to the wellbeing of our Muslim communities in particular and the North American society in general

As such, teen activism is an important tool in helping raise strong, confident Muslim teens who feel a sense of worth in being contributing members of the community and society. Cooperation between Muslim families, community leaders of Mosques, Islamic centers, and main stream officials

[38] Al Bukhary, Atermezy, and Ibn Majah
[39] At Tabarany
[40] Ahmad

is a must for the success of activism programs for our teens. There are many success stories of teen activism among various Muslim communities all over North America. These success stories should be shared with other communities. A logical platform for this would be the specialized sessions of the Islamic annual conventions.

Here are some of the areas in which we can get our youth involved and active:

- Organizing major community events such as Eid celebrations/ festivals and open houses, etc.
- Organizing sports competitions among Muslims living in the same city or intercity competitions in regions where cities are close by.
- Tapping into main stream projects to help our Muslim teens participate in events such as the following:
  - Planting trees
  - Cleaning parks
  - Supervising young children during trips
  - Helping in Hospitals and senior citizen home, etc.

Q.31

My son, who is 15 years old, wants to join his school's football team. I feel that having our children involved in sports activities is a positive and healthy thing. However, I'm concerned that the culture of the school football team may include certain practices that are not proper (that go against our Islamic values and principles). Should I allow my son to join his school football team or not?

Answer

There are a few points to address in answering this question. They are the following:

- The culture of sports teams in schools differs immensely depending on the level of schooling. Sports team culture in elementary and middle school will vary greatly from that of high schools. As such, it is important to consider the age of the child and what kind of school he goes to. In the absence of such information, we find ourselves obliged to provide certain guidelines as an answer and hope that the reader will pick what is right for her/his situation.

- In general, there is nothing wrong with our children getti involved and participating in various activities in their school long as these activities don't include anything that is Islamic unacceptable.

- In such situations, parents should use every opportunity to trai the child in certain skills. For example, in this situation, the parents can train the child in the proper decision making process. This is a real situation and they should use the opportunity to teach him how to collect all the information that will help him make the right decision, how to analyze this information to come up with alternatives, and how to assess the pros and cons of each alternative, etc.

- Suppose after the issue is researched, it was found that there are certain activities of the football team that don't contradict our Islamic values, while others are not acceptable to us from an Islamic point of view. Parents should discuss with the child to come up with a way for the son to participate in the acceptable activities of the team while avoiding the unacceptable ones.
- It is of utmost importance that the son is an active part of all these discussions and that no decision is made by the parents alone. Including the son in the discussions will make him feel that his parents value his input in the matter and will help ensure that he will accept the end decision and try to stick to it, even if it is a bit difficult.

Q. 32

My son is 17 years old. Whenever I advise him about something, he says: "I'm an adult, I'm free to do what I want." What should I do in this situation?

Answer Most scholars and psychologists define the age of your son as falling near the end of the middle adolescent stage. Two of the main characteristics of this stage are:

1. The teen is actively seeking and looking for independence
2. The teen doesn't like to be ordered around or instructed directly with regards to what he should or should not do

Because of this, sometimes teens in this stage resort to rebelling against their parents' orders in order to prove their independence. This occurs more when parents neglect to build a strong bond and good relationship with their children by not investing wisely in the early years of their childhood. Also, although at 17 years old teens are not as sensitive as in the early adolescent stages, they still don't feel comfortable when their parents order them to do specific things. This is particularly so when these orders are related to the way they look, the way they dress and the way they do things in general. These orders or words of advice are also not appreciated if they are given in front of other siblings or friends.

If it's any consolation, rest assured that your teen's behaviour is perfectly normal and you shouldn't be alarmed by such behaviour. As long as he respects you and speaks with you politely regarding his desire to make his own decision because he is an adult now, you should be happy that he is maturing and wants to be a responsible adult. Don't forget that at this age, Osamah Ibn Zaid *RAA*, was assigned the leadership of the Prophet's army.

Also a great number of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* were around this age.

We also think you can maintain a healthier relationship with your teen if you don't directly order him to do certain things. Try to formulate what you want him to do in the form of a suggestion to him. For example, rather than telling him, "Why don't you do such and such?" you could say, "How about doing such and such?", or "What do you think about doing such and such?"

Q. 33

My daughter is 14 years old and my son is 12 years old. Alhamdulellah they are doing OK academically. I try to keep them at home away from any risk of danger. I don't allow them to be part of any extra curricular activities for fear of the culture and what they could learn from these activities. They are always complaining that they are bored and they are not very welcoming of the idea of just always memorizing Qur'an as a way to fill their time. They are always asking to watch TV and sit long hours in front of the computer. They occasionally ask me to go to the movies with their classmates. Whenever I object to this, they say there is nothing else for them to do. I should also mention that they don't have friends because I'm afraid of the negative influence their friends might have on them. Am I doing the right thing? Should I allow them to have friends knowing that for sure they will have a negative effect on m children's personality? Should I allow them to go to the movies wit their classmates? Please help me. I'm really confused and don't kno what to do.

Answer

This question covers many important and sensitiv areas in the lives of our children We will try t address our sister's concern in as much detail as we can insha'a Allah. Le us go over them one by one:

- Am I doing the right thing? You are partially doing the right thing with your children with respect to certain areas of their development. However, you are neglecting other important areas. There is no doubt that you are trying to protect them from the harmful effects and risks associated with popular teen culture in North America. You are also trying to get them to memorize Qur'an and they are doing well academically alhamdulellah. These are all good things you are trying to do and we all agree on

that. However, what is important is the approach we use to achieve these goals. Neither is isolating our children from the environment around them the proper approach, nor is allowing them to assimilate fully correct either. The methodology we should adopt is to teach and train them to make the right decision in each situation they face so that they can integrate intelligently (by benefiting from the right practices in society and avoiding the harmful ones). It was said that good practices are the goal of a believer, wherever s/he finds them, s/he is the most deserving of using them.[41] We need our children to be strong and capable of making the correct choices when they are faced with any situation even in our absence. Isolating your children from the society they are living in and always keeping them at home without allowing them to have any friends will neither train them to be strong nor capable of making the correct decisions.

• Should I allow them to have friends knowing that for sure they will have a negative effect on my children's personality? Humans are social beings. Having friends is a natural need for every one and more so particularly for children. Ask yourself how many friends you had when you were your children's age. Were you sad when you moved from one house or one school to another because you would miss your friends? How eager were you to meet new friends in your new neighborhood or in your new school? Parents should acknowledge their children's need for friends. Not only that, but they should also teach them how to select friends because of their tremendous impact on their personalities. They should make use of the wonderful Prophetic advices in this area.[42] Here are two of these sayings:

> "On the authority of *Abu Huraira RAA* who reported that he heard the Messenger of Allah *SAAW* saying: A man follows his friends religion, so each one should consider whom he makes his friend."[43]

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[41] Ibn Majjah

[42] See Chapter 1-45 of "Riadul Salehhen" titled "Visiting the Pious and Sitting with Them as well as Adopting Their Company" for various teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* related to this subject

[43] At Termizy and Abu Dawood

> "On the authority of Abu Mussa Al-Ash'ari *RAA* that he heard the Messenger of Allah *SAAW* saying: The similitude of good company and that of bad company is that of the owner of musk and of the one (iron-smith) blowing bellows. The owner of musk would either offer it to you free of charge, or you would buy it from him, or you would smell its pleasant odor. As for the iron-smith, he would either burn your clothes or you shall have to smell its repugnant smell"[44]

Parents should also help their children in finding good friends who will have a positive impact on their personalities. It is crucial that you monitor any changes in your child's behaviour as a result of a friendship, evaluate the situation frequently, and provide any necessary adjustments such as decreasing or increasing the time your child spends with this friend depending on the effect he/she is having on your child.

• Should I allow them to go to the movies with their classmates? The answer to this question will depend on what type of movie s/he wants to see. The answer will sometimes be no, and at other times it may be yes. The most important thing when children ask us a question like this is to train them to consider the proper criteria based on which we can see the movie or not. As such, you should ask him/her to find out about the movie, the plot, any unacceptable scenes, violence, the language used in the movie, etc. before saying yes or no. You should ask him/her to research the above aspects of the movie which is really easy to do through the internet these days and report back to you. Based on the findings, you will decide to allow him/her to go or not to go. If you decide not to allow him/her to go for a specific reason, such as some objectionable scenes in the movie or the use of vulgar language, make sure you explain to him/her, in language they understand, why your answer is no. It is better yet to walk him/her through the logic and your chain of thoughts so s/he could make such decisions on his/her own. Also, make sure that

[44] Agreed Upon

you don't continuously refuse to allow them to go to the movies or suggest alternative activities if the movie is not appropriate. Don't be very strict in your measuring criteria. Allow them to go occasionally but make sure that when they come back you discuss the movie with them and correct any misconceptions they may have because of watching the movie.

To help wean your son and daughter off wanting to go to the movies regularly, you should strive to instill and ingrain certain Islamic concepts in their souls and minds. They should understand that they were created for a purpose and that this life is not just for us to do whatever we want. Every thing we do in this life should contribute positively to fulfilling the ultimate goal of our creation: to worship Allah *SWT* and please Him. We refer the reader to the answer of the first question in this book to help her in this endeavor.

We also recommend that you work hard with your children to make sure that they understand that wealth and time are blessings from Allah *SWT* and that we will be asked about how we used them in this life.[45] Use the numerous sayings given in this reference to help you with this task.

[45] Check the book of Dr. Yousef Al Qaradawi, *Time in the life of a Muslim* for a variety of Qur'anic verses, Prophetic teachings and sayings of the companions of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* related to the concept of time in a Muslim's life.

Miscellaneous

Q. 34

(a) I was raised up in the old country, where my father or my mother would tell me: do this and I would do it right away without questioning. My parents never discussed with me the wisdom or the reason behind any of their orders. Also I never expected them to offer any reasoning. Children never dared to ask parents: why or protested and said: I wouldn't do it? After reading some of your books and learning some positive parenting skills I understand that you are advocating dialoging, reasoning and discussing everything with our children especially teens. However, when I try to apply these techniques, I found out that I easily get worked out and upset when my children ask me to give reasons or argue with me regarding my orders.

How can I get myself to accept the idea that my children have the right to ask and that I should listen to their point of view without getting angry and suspend my judgment during the discussion? How can I control my anger to be able to use these positive parenting skills techniques effectively?

(34-b) I get angry very easily when my children do something wrong. I shout, yell, and order them around. This behaviour always ends up with more conflicts between me and my children. It is also creating a big gap between us. Can you please advice me what to do?

Answer

JAK for your question. It is encouraging to note that you realized the bad effects of getting angry very easily on your relation with your children. This is a positive step and could be considered the first phase in solving your anger problem.

To help you with this it is important to remember that Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* advised us in many of his teachings not to get angry and to try our best to control our anger.[40] Not only he did this, but he *SAAW* also taught us many

[40] See chapter 28 of our book, *Parenting Skills Based on The Qur'an and Sunnah* by amana Publications for details of the saying of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* on this issue.

anger management techniques that we should be using to manage and control our angers such as the following:

- Change your body position
- Make Wudu'
- Say " I seek refuge from Shaytan
- Keep silent "

It is our duty as Muslims and for the sake of our well being and the well being of our children that we train ourselves to control our anger using some of the above anger management techniques. Not only this, but we also should train our children to do the same.

We also refer the reader to the answer of question seven in the first section of this book to benefit from the self search process explained in details to help him managing his anger problem.

[47] See the same reference above for more details on the subject

Q. 35

I have three boys of 11, 9, and 7 years old. My husband is very kind. He loves and cares for our family. He works very hard to make sure that we have everything we need and live at a very comfortable level economically. Alhamdulellah because of his hard work, we have everything we need. Our house is very spacious and well furnished with everything we need. We have more than one computer and the most recent technology in entertainment systems (More than one flat screen TV, DVD players, etc.) We also have a huge swimming pool and more than one car of the latest model loaded with all kinds of features. To maintain this standard of living, my husband has to work very long hours. When he gets back home, the children are usually asleep, and on the rare occasion that he gets home while they are awake, he is too tired to spend time with them. He is also busy during the weekends and seldom has he taken time off from his busy schedule. Even during vacation he has his cell phone with him and often follows up on business. I feel that the boys need to spend time with him at this stage of their lives because, though I can do so much with them, I can't fill the position of their father. I'm afraid that a huge gap is being created between them and their father. I'm scared of the consequences of this. My question is, how much time should a father spend with his children and how can we rectify this situation?

Answer

This is a very serious situation and the concern of our sister is valid and genuine. It is quite unfortunate that a great number of Muslim fathers living in North America are in the same situation in terms of not being part of their children's lives, even if they are not very busy with their businesses, as in the case we are discussing.

From the Islamic point of view, and based on evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah, parenting is a shared responsibility between both parents.

They have to work together to ensure the best family atmosphere for the healthy and positive development of their children. Failing to do so will result in very serious consequences.

There is nothing wrong with working hard to provide a good and dignified standard of living for our families. However, we should always strive to achieve balance in our lives. Humans need spiritual, mental, and emotional development as much as they need physical development. Having spacious houses filled with all sorts of material objects will not and can not help the spiritual and emotional development of our children. Only a good, loving family atmosphere and a strong bond between parents and children, filled with genuine guidance characterized by wisdom, can help in this area of our children's development.

In a Monitoring the Future Study conducted by Michigan University in 1998, it was found that the average time a father spends with his children is three minutes a day. By all measures, this is a disaster and could easily explain the serious situation of teenagers in North America.

The children in this case are all in the preteen stage, where they are looking for the approval of their peers and trying to fit in with the culture around them. They need the presence of their father in their lives. The mother can't fulfill all their needs. The father has to be closely involved with them and share their aspirations and ambitious. He has to spend time gently coaching and guiding them, helping them navigate the dangerous maze of popular teen culture in North America. To succeed in this job, the father has to establish a very strong bond between himself and his children. This can't be achieved without spending time with them.

One more very important piece of advice to this family to help resolve the situation: please sit down together to discuss and seriously re-evaluate your priorities in life. Make sure to put your children on the top of your priority list. The father should reduce his working hours to free himself up for the more important matter of getting involved with his children. The mother should help in cooperating with the father by planning family time in a way that helps reduce pressure on the father.

Another idea for this family to consider is to engage their children in activities conducted by Muslim Youth Centers in their city if they are available. If not, consider sending them to Muslim Youth Camps during school breaks, and summer holidays. These types of activities provide a wonderful environment for their spiritual, mental, social, and physical development.

Q.36

We have two children who are 4 and 6 years old. My wife and myself love being a part of the community. We help in the Mosque, and attend all the activities in our Islamic center. However, every time we go to the center to participate in certain activities, our boys make lots of noise during the Salat. This makes other worshippers in the Mosque very upset because they can't concentrate in their Salat. The other day, one of the brothers shouted and yelled at my kids after the Salat because of the noise they made. I was embarrassed and felt very bad about it. My question consists of two parts.

First, how can we keep our children quiet during Salat?

Second, does this brother have the right to shout and yell at our children like this? I'm afraid that this incident may make them hate coming to the center. Please advise,

Answer Thank you very much for your question brother. This is certainly a common problem in many communities and we really need to pay attention to it. We don't want to drive young Muslim children away from Mosques and Islamic Centers, but at the same time we would like to keep prayer halls quiet for others to enjoy the time they spend in them and properly perform their Salat in a peaceful atmosphere. In our view, the solution to this problem requires that parents and community officials work together. Parents will mainly work on training their children in the proper behaviour while they are outside the home in various gatherings, particularly in the prayer halls of Mosques and Islamic centers. Community officials have to put a system in place for how to deal with kids running around and making noise in the prayer halls, and make this system known to each and every community member. Here are some suggestions for both areas:

• To train their children to behave properly, parents should:

– Talk to your children before going to the mosque and explain to them that you are going to the Mosque where other people will be. Explain what the Mosque is and why we go there, emphasizing the importance of being very quiet during prayer. Indicate to them that Allah *SWT* will love them and reward them when they don't cause disturbance during *Salat*. Also tell them that if they stay quiet during Salat you too will reward them with something they like.

– While they are in the Mosque and between prayer times, allow them to play in the common area. When the call for prayer is made, take them aside and explain to them again that they have to be very quite during prayer. If the Mosque has a designated room for children/baby sitting, take them to this room. It may be a good idea for parents who have children coming to the mosque, to rotate in supervising the children during prayer. If the mosque is not equipped with a baby sitting room, make sure you bring a coloring book with you for your children or a toy that they can play with quietly during Salat. This will help keep them busy and minimize their disturbance. Make sure they are next to you during Salat, engaged in their activity.

– After coming back from the Mosque, thank your children for being quiet during the Salat in the Mosque and praise them for their good behaviour. You may also like to reward them with something they like.

– Do the above consistently every time you go to the mosque. It may take sometime for them to get use to the routine.

• For the Mosque officials, here are some suggestions:

– Develop a clear written policy explaining various steps to deal with the issue of noise in the Center in general and prayer halls in particular

– Communicate this policy to community members via news- letters, e-mails, regular announcements during community gathering and meetings. Post a few copies of the policy terms in obvious places around the Center

– Assign a few community members to take care of ensuring that the policy is being followed and enforced. It is recommended that those members wear a special uniform or at least have a clear badge indicating that they are responsible for order in the Center.

– Request other community members, when they see any violation of the order policy, to refer it to the Policy Enforcement Volunteers. Only PEV should deal with issues related to keeping order and minimizing noise in the center. Other community members should try their best not to take the issue into their hands to avoid driving people away from the Mosque and to reduce the possibility of friction among community members.

Q.37

My daughter is 9 years old. Unfortunately, my husband is not of the religious kind so since she was born he used to sit with her on his lap and watch all kinds of TV shows and movies (including scenes of adults getting intimate with each other). He did this with her until she was about 6 or so, then he stopped watching certain things in front of her but continued to watch others no matter how much I protested. That is the only time he would spend with her. Recently at Sunday school she was told about ALL the conditions of Ghusl, they are all written in the Children's book of Salah. Since no explanations were given in the book, and being the curious child she is, she went and looked up the meanings of all the words she did not understand and I don't know what she understood from it. Now she can't stop thinking about it. She is always imagining people without clothes kissing and all that. She is very distressed about it. We have completely stopped watching TV even though it means we have to eat dinner in the bedroom because her Dad still watches TV over dinner. We are praying a lot more, saying AsthugfurAllah and Aaudubillah, reading, and listening to the stories of the Prophets but she doesn't seem to get any relief. It is like she is getting those thoughts every minute. She is telling me all the thoughts she gets. I am praying to Allah Subhanatalla as much as I can. Recently she has started to say that she is a bad person. I do not know how to help her with this. Please help me to help her. She is also thinking about liking boys. She says she knows it is Haram but she can't help her thoughts. PLEASE help this desperate mother.

Jazak Allah Khair

Answer The following are a few suggestions for what we think you could do to help improve this situation. However, you have to realize that your daughter was exposed to these influences for a very long time and at a very sensitive age. To overcome

this, you need to be consistent in applying these suggestions, be patient, and don't expect a quick fix solution.

• Explain to your daughter that no person is born bad and that Allah *SWT* created everybody good with a choice to be good or bad in the future. What makes people good or bad are their actions. She hasn't done anything to make her a bad person.Explain to her that as for the images she saw on TV, yes they are bad images and no body should watch them. But at that time she was a young child and as long as she doesn't watch such images now because she realizes it is wrong, she can make repentance (*tawbah*) and Allah *SWT* will insha'a Allah forgive her because Allah *SWT* tells us in the Qur'an that he accepts the repentance from His servants and forgives sins. One exercise that may be very helpful to do is to go over the verses in the Qur'an that talk about *Tawbah* and forgiveness and study them with her. The book of Riadu Al-Saleheen has a complete chapter on Repentance and forgiveness and could be very handy for this exercise. The focus during this exercise is to assure her that repentance is the way to erase mistakes but that there are conditions to be fulfilled for the acceptance of repentance, such as:

– To feel bad about what happened, which she does
– To make a commitment not to repeat the bad action again
– To commit to do extra acts of obedience

In addition to saying *asteghfer* Allah, it is very important that you provide opportunities for your daughter to do good deeds such as giving charity, helping others, visiting a sick person, etc. Make sure that the child does these good actions by herself. For example if she is going to donate to a charity, let her donate from her own money/allowance.

• Because the child was exposed to bad visual images for a long time, these need to be replaced by other positive visual images that will help refocus the child's emotions. A good DVD that we recommend is called "Mercy to Mankind" produced by MAS youth in Dallas Texas. The address to order is www.atasproduction.com. In addition to this, please look for other quality Islamic videos/DVDs for children. Please visit ISNA media mall at www.isna.net as well as the ICNA web page at www.icna.org for further productions. Please watch these visual productions with her on a regular

basis. Reading Islamic stories is also good, so you should continue to read with her.

• As for thinking about boys, explain to your daughter that sometimes girls think about boys, but they should fight these thoughts by doing something that is more productive and get busy to distract themselves. Also explain to her that as long as she fights these thoughts and realizes that they are not appropriate and doesn't act upon them by, for example, talking to her girl friends about boys or so, she will get over these thoughts insha'a Allah. She should also make *Dua'a* to Allah to help clear her mind of thinking about boys or seeing these images of people without clothes on.

• Please follow the suggestions mentioned above and continue to patiently implement all of them as they are very important for improving your situation. It will take time to see improvements, but don't give up and make lots of *Dua'a* after prayer and at *Tahajud* time for Allah to help your daughter.

• One question that your daughter may ask is: what about Dad? She is probably thinking that her dad is doing bad things and there is no easy way out of that because you have to be clear with her that these kinds of actions (watching bad scenes on TV) are wrong. Explain to her that the real role model for us is the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* and that we are all trying to follow his example and that if Dad is doing something wrong, he will have to answer to Allah *SWT*. But also tell her that you should both make *Dua'a* for him and still treat him properly because Allah ordered us to do so and He ordered children to respect their parents even if they have their differences but to always obey Allah's orders before the orders of a parent if the two contradict.

• It is important to explain to your husband what is going on with your daughter, the details of the images she sees, and how disturbed she is by them. You should clarify to him that, in order to help her come to terms with what is going on with her, you have to tell her that watching such things is *Haram* and that she was too young to be responsible for what she used to see at the time. To keep her trust in her Dad, who was a responsible adult when

he did such actions, it would be good if he tells her that though he did this stuff, he is now doing tawabah for it because he is now going to stop doing these bad things. Explain to your husband that if you don't take this position, your daughter might do these things when she grows up, especially since she lives in a society that sees nothing wrong with this kind of life style. If he doesn't stop and talk to his daughter about doing *tawbah*, she will lose her trust in him and it may be difficult for her to stay good. Please try to be very tactful in handling this issue with your husband so he doesn't get defensive and completely go against what you are saying to prove that he didn't do anything wrong.

We pray to Allah to make it easy on you and help ease this problem.

Q.38

I understand from your books as well as other books on the subject of parenting that raising children is a very serious matter. As such, parents should do their best to make sure that they raise their children as strong and confident Muslims. I feel that this is not an easy job and that it requires a great deal of time and lots of sacrifices from parents. At the same time, living here in North America requires us to volunteer our time to help in establishing our community by working together on various projects. This is causing a dilemma for me. I have been contemplating stopping my volunteer work with the community so that I can focus only on my children and their needs. What do you think about this? Is this the right attitude or am I missing something?

Jazakum Allah Khayran

Answer

There is no doubt that raising children is a very serious matter and a huge responsibility from the parents' side. It is certainly a very important and extremely demanding job, particularly here in North America where most parents lack a support system from the extended family as well as from the society at large.

Having said this, it is also crucial for parents to understand that they should employ a holistic approach in their quest on this noble task, namely, raising confident Muslim children in North America. This means that parents should try to look at this little human they are trying to raise as a complete being and satisfy his/her various needs, be it physical needs, spiritual needs, emotional needs, psychological needs, social needs, or intellectual needs.

It is unfortunate that most parents think mainly about the physical needs

of their children. This is a big mistake and an unhealthy approach to parenting, which will not and cannot lead to the desired results that we want for our children here in North America.

To be able to satisfy the various needs of our children mentioned above, it can't be done in isolation of our community or the society we are living in. Parents can't afford to detach themselves from their communities and even from the main stream society, thinking that this way they will be able to focus more on their children. The healthy development of our children requires that we have a very strong community with many well-established institutions to help in facilitating essential activities needed by our children and noteworthy projects for them to get involved into.

It is very important for parents to understand that certain activities can't be accomplished by parents alone. We need the help of our community's institutions. For example, the healthy development of our children requires that parents provide a positive and active life style for them. This includes sports activities, camps, youth groups and so on. If the institutions of our community are not strong enough, they won't be able to provide these activities and platforms for our children and youth. It is of paramount importance that we work hard with other volunteers to establish these institutions and make sure that they are strong enough to help our children in their healthy development in all of the above areas.

Based on the above discussion, we hold the view that it is a big mistake for parents to isolate themselves and avoid volunteering with the community, thinking that this way they will have more time on their hands and will be able to better take care of their children. On the contrary, being an involved parent and volunteering with the community is a proven investment with guaranteed positive returns for ourselves, our children and the community as a whole. However, certain precautions have to be in place for this methodology to succeed, such as:

- Having a clear vision for your child's development. This is a must. This vision should answer the question, "What do I want my child to be when s/he grows up?" (and we are not referring to their future profession here, but more to the qualities you hope

they will possess as a person). This vision will provide you with guidance during various stages of your child's life.

- The key to success is in balancing your involvement with various community groups and organizations, while managing your time properly to achieve your vision for your child. This should be your ultimate goal and driving force.
- Try to be part of the activities planning committee in your community. Whenever activities are organized, make sure they cover the needs of the whole family including parents and children.
- If you are not a member of the planning group, always encourage community leaders and activity organizers to plan programs with the whole family in mind.
- Encourage other families with children to get involved in community projects and activities. The more families helping in building our institutions, the less effort needed from each of them.

Q.39

I believe that the best way of raising children is for both parents to be involved and work together. However, I have to be away from my family for long periods of time because of my job. How would this impact my children? I tried my best to find a job in the city where my family lives to no avail!!!

Can you please advise me as to what to do?

Jazakum Allah Khayran,

Answer Nowadays, there are many Muslim families facing this situation where the father lives away from the family because of job conditions. Of course, the best possible scenario is for the family to try to all live in the same place and be together. However, if the circumstances don't allow for this, then the father and the mother need to work as a team even more, such that they both agree on a parenting strategy and have one vision for raising their children. The mother in this case will be the one who is carrying out most of the plan. However, the father should come to visit and spend time with the family frequently. At these times, both of them should be in agreement as to the way they will deal with the children. It should be obvious to the children that their parents are united in their parenting methods.

- During these visits, the father should try his best to interact with the children and be a part of their lives
- The father should also try to be in touch with the family and particularly the children through regular phone calls as well as e-mails

- The father also needs to realize that his wife needs all the support she can get in such a situation and should try to provide as much support as he can in every possible way, be in touch with his wife, and follow up on the children's affairs
- If the family has a boy who is a pre-teen, this boy needs a male role model in his life. The father should pay close attention to this and be in touch with this boy more often so he can see him as a role model. Also, during the father's absence, this role model could be provided by an uncle, a teacher, or the Imam of the community
- Before traveling, the father should spend some time alone with his son leaving him with the impression that he is the man of the house in the father's absence, and agreeing with him to do certain things related to house chores suitable to the son's age.
- The father should try his best when he comes back for visits not to spoil the children out of guilt. Many fathers in this position do this thinking that they are compensating for their absence

This book is the second in a series that contains detailed answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the hot topic of parenting in North America. Because some of these questions have been raised more than once in recent years, we feel that they represent crucial issues of concern occupying the minds of many parents. Making these answers available in a written format will hopefully provide Muslim parents with the proper advice supported by the *Qur'an* and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*.
The methodology used in answering these questions draws heavily on verses of the Qur'an, teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, and events in his *Seerah*, as well as the authors' wealth of practical experience, gained from their countless parenting counseling sessions over the years, and their knowledge of child psychology.

Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir as a wife/husband team, together co-authored several best-selling parenting books such as "Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West," "Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope," "Blissful Marriage" and "Parenting Skills based on Qur'an and Sunnah." They have also authored parenting books in Arabic. Some of their parenting books have been translated to French and German languages. They are teaching two courses on the subject of parenting with the Islamic American University. They are both regular contributors to the family section of several magazines such as "American Muslim," "Islamic Horizons". and the "Message magazine." Both Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir are also advisers on the Islam online website family section. **Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir are the recipients of the City of Ottawa Certificate of Appreciation for the year 2003 for their volunteer work in the area of Education.** They have traveled extensively, presenting workshops to various Muslim communities all over the world.

Dr. Ekram Beshir

- She is a medical doctor by profession, with a background in child psychology.
- She is the founder of both *Abraar* full-time Islamic school and *Rahma* School, a weekend Arabic and Islamic school, in Ottawa, Canada.
- She is the recipient of the Director's Citation Award of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board for the year 2000 for her contribution in the area of education from among 7000 employees of the board.
- She has been very active with the Muslim community in Ottawa in the areas of study circles, children and youth camps, sisters programs, and marriage counseling.
- She has traveled extensively to various parts of the world to present parenting workshops.
- She has also authored other books for teaching Arabic to Muslim children living in Non- Arabic speaking countries.

Dr. Mohamed Rida Beshir

- He is an engineer by profession, with over 30 years of experience in Da'wa work in North America
- He has held various positions with MSA and ISNA, MAS on both national and local levels.
- He served as a member of the training and development department of the Muslim American Society (MAS) for over two decades.
- He is actively developing and delivering training programs to various Muslim communities all over the world.
- He is a regular speaker in ISNA, ICNA, MSA, MAC and MAS conferences.
- He is the recipient of the Ottawa Muslim Association and Ottawa Muslim Community Circle appreciation awards for years 1993, and 1999 for his volunteer Islamic work in the National Capital region

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